

BOOK IV.

SHAKSPEARE'S TRAGEDIES.

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SHAKSPEARE'S DRAMATIC ART.

BOOK I.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIES, OR MIRACLE PLAYS.

ALL art is in its origin connected with religion. Strange as this may sound, in regard to the structure and position of the modern drama, still it is no less certain that the Church was also its birth-place. This has been disputed by referring to the earlier dramatic attempts of the Christian era, to Ezechiel's 'Life of Moses,' to the *Χριστὸς πάσχων* (which is said to have been written in the fourth century, by Gregory of Nazianzus, but probably belonged to a more recent date), to the 'Querolus' of Ausonius and his 'Ludus septem sapientium,' to the 'Ocipus,' an allegorical comedy, to the 'Judicium Vulcani' and others, from the sixth to the ninth century, and lastly to the dramas of the well-known Hroswitha, a nun of Gandersheim (about the year 980), which are tales in dialogue written in Latin prose, and, as she herself says, imitations of Terence. However, certain as it is that these most ancient examples of dramatising a freely chosen subject have nothing to do with either religion or the Church, but are directly connected with the theatrical representations and the dramatic compositions of the ancients, as certain is it that they have little or nothing to do with the origin of the

modern drama. They were works of learning, written by priests and monks who were acquainted with ancient literature, and were probably often mere exercises in literary industry, specimens of a dead erudition, which if they were ever acted, scarcely ever crossed the threshold of the monasteries. In later times this connection between modern art and the remains of ancient culture, which was never entirely interrupted, certainly did become of importance; the latter essentially contributed to the development and to the perfecting of the former. But the origin of our drama lies elsewhere; its first beginnings were the so-called *Mysteries* or *Miracle Plays*, and these, without any traceable influence from those earlier attempts, arose directly out of the rites of the Catholic Church, even though under the influence of the life and culture of the people.

The origin of *Mysteries* has been explained in various ways and traced to different sources; and no doubt various causes did co-operate in bringing to light the first germs of the modern drama. It must especially be regarded as of high importance that the taste for scenic representations had remained in full vigour among the nations of southern Europe, ever since the time of the Romans, and thus supported the class of mimes, pantomimes, and histriones against the attacks of the clergy; in northern Europe, however, this taste made common cause with the dramatic elements of the old heathen worship, and the popular customs connected therewith.* The germ, however, doubtless lay from the very commencement in the early Christian form of worship.† This germ, which only

* Dramatic elements of this kind, according to J. Grimm, are found in the so-called *Jul-Spiel*, the *Wichel-Spiel*, *Baren-Spiel*, *Pfingst-Spiel*, *Oster-Spiel*, etc., which he characterises as the first attempts of dramatic art, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 2nd edition, p. 744; compare also pp. 410, 740, 1200, 1216).

† The following are the works made use of for this history of the origin and development of *Mysteries*:—‘The Harrowing of Hell,’ a miracle play written in the reign of Edward II., now first published, etc. by J. O. Halliwell, London, 1840. ‘The Towneley Mysteries,’ London, 1836 (in the Publications of the Surtees Society, edited by Hunter.) ‘The Chester Plays,’ a collection of *Mysteries*, etc., edit. by Th. Wright, Lond., Printed for the Shakspeare Soc. 1843.

required air, light, and warmth for its development, lay in the representative and picturesque character which the early Christian (Greek) liturgy received with its first definite forms, and ever continued to develop.* Hence that custom of the earliest Church, according to which the priest, while reading the sacred stories (of the Gospels and the Epistles), used to unfold a roll, which, on the

'*Ludus Coventriæ*,' a Collection of Mysteries, etc., edit. by J. O. Halliwell, Lond., Pr. f. t. Sh. S. 1841. *W. Marriott*: 'A Collection of English Miracle Plays or Mysteries,' etc., Basil, 1838. *Th. Sharp*: 'A Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries, anciently performed at Coventry by the Trading Companies of that City,' Coventry, 1825. *Th. Hawkins*: 'The Origin of the English Drama,' etc., London, 1775, vol. i. *J. P. Collier*: 'The History of English Dramatic Poetry,' etc., Lond. 1831, vol. i. *Th. Wright*: 'Early Mysteries and other Latin Poems of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,' etc., Lond., 1844 (contains, among others, the ten Latin Mysteries of the twelfth century, from a MS. in the library of Orleans, hence of French origin, which have been published by Monmerque: 'Mysteria et Miracula ad scenam ordinata, in cœnobis olim a monachis representata,' etc., Paris, 1834). *A. Ebert*: 'Jahrbuch für romanische u. englische Literatur,' Berlin, 1858-59. 'Hilarii versus et ludi,' *Ed. Champollion-Figeac*, Paris, 1838. *Achille Jubinal*: 'Mystères inédits du XV^{me} siècle,' Paris, 1837. *Monmerqué et F. Michel*: 'Théâtre Français au moyen âge,' Par. 1839. *Viollet-le-Duc*: 'Ancien Théâtre Français, ou collection des ouvrages dramatiques depuis les Mystères jusqu'à Corneille,' Paris, 1854. *V. Luzarche*: 'Office de Pâques ou de la Résurrection, accompagné de la notation musicale,' etc., 'd'après un manuscrit du XII^{me} siècle,' Tours, 1856. *The same*: 'Adam, drame anglo-normand du XII^{me} siècle,' Tours, 1854. *Pez*: 'Thesaurus Anecd. nov.' t. ii. p. iii. col. 185, sqq. *Docen*, 'In v. Aretin's Beiträge zur Gesch. und Literatur,' vol. vii. *H. Hoffmann*: 'Fundgruben für Geschichte deutscher Sprache und Literatur,' part ii., Breslau, 1837. *Mone*: 'Schauspiele des Mittelalters,' Carlsruhe, 1846. *Freitag*: 'De initio scenicæ poësis ap. Germanos' Berol., 1838. *Gervinus*: 'Gesch. der poetischen National-Literatur der Deutschen,' vol. ii. p. 359 ff. *Vilmar*: 'Geschichte d. deutsch. National-Liter.,' p. 366 ff. *E. Devrient*: 'Geschichte d. deutsch. Schauspielkunst,' vol. i., Leipzig, 1848. *A. Koberstein*: 'Grundriss der Gesch. d. deutsch. National-Literatur,' 2nd edition, Leipzig, 1847, vol. i. p. 403 f. *K. Hase*: 'Das geistliche Schauspiel, Geschichtliche Uebersicht,' Leipz., 1858. *K. Bartsch*: 'Das älteste deutsche Passions-Spiel,' Vienna, 1863.

* This similarity in form between the early Christian liturgy and Greek tragedy, is very ingeniously pointed out by J. L. Klein: *Geschichte des Dramas*, vol. iv.; *Geschichte des Italienischen Dramas*, Leipzig, 1866, i. 3 ff.

side turned towards the congregation, displayed a figured representation of that portion of the Scriptures which was being read; those therefore who did not understand the words, or could not readily follow them, might, by looking at the picture, be instructed in the contents of the lesson, and thus have their understanding and feelings aroused. It was for the same reason that, in the fourth century, the walls of churches were adorned with pictures; the same reason then gave rise to the introduction of altar-pieces, crucifixes, the so-called *Biblia pauperum* (picture Bibles), as also to the more and more expanded and increased number of the *responsoria* and *antiphonæ*, the construction of which inclines to the characters of a dialogue.* In short, the appeal to the eye, as a means of edification, was from the very first an element of the early Christian form of worship. Even in the first centuries this element appears to have developed into a species of representation in the form of *tableaux vivants*, which became interwoven with the liturgy; at all events in the fifth century, certain incidents in Gospel history, such as the Adoration of the Wise Men, the Marriage at Cana, &c., were represented at high festivals in this manner.† When, in later times, the Church had developed itself internally, and, at a still later date, when directing its attention more to external matters, it endeavoured to furnish the acquired contents with form and shape, and to endow the power of the spirit with sovereignty over the body, when, accordingly, the sense of the inner eye, as it were, awoke, and excited in the imagination an ungovernable desire for sight-seeing, driving men into distant and strange lands in search of wonderful adventures (which gave rise to crusades and pilgrimages, the journeys of adventurous knights, and led to the rise of the plastic arts from the twelfth century), then the priests were more energetic in their endeavours to give to the liturgic actions a more and more plastic and sensuous character. On high festivals, narrative hymns, such as the so-called sequences and

* The principal elements of this kind have been collected by von Schack (*Geschichte d. dramat. Literat. u. Kunst in Spanien*, Berlin, 1845, i. 19 ff.).

† Jubinal, p. viii.; Klein, p. 15 f.

prosa,* were introduced into the liturgy, and accompanied by representations in the form of *tableaux vivants*. On Good Friday, a crucifix was erected, round which the priests assembled and recited Christ's Passion in alternating chants, after which, amid funeral lamentations, the crucifix was placed in a kind of grave below the altar; on Easter Sunday, however, it was again brought forth and the Resurrection was celebrated.† This rite, distinguished as the *passio, sepultura et resurrectio*, was called a *Mysterium*. Soon, the three Maries and the angel were added, the former to anoint Christ's body, the latter to inform them that He had risen from the dead. Then the other principal characters—Christ, Mary, and John—were entrusted to certain persons who had only to say or sing the words belonging to the different characters. Subsequently the coming and going of the various persons introduced the first beginning of an action, a number of groups were formed, and life and motion were given to the picture. Lastly, the persons representing the different characters received dresses adapted to their parts, mimicking and gestures came of themselves, and the result was a *dramatic Mysterium*, a religious play.‡

* These originally were simply musical and melodious modulations on the end of the great doxology, *In secula seculorum—Amen*; in later times the so-called *Improperia*, the *Stabat Mater*, the *Dies iræ*, etc., were used instead, and received the same name. *Prosa* were, among other things, representations from the lives of the saints.

Grieshaber: *Ueber die Ostersegnung Victimæ paschali und deren Beziehung zu den religiösen Schauspielen des Mittelalters*. Karlsruhe, 1844.

‡ Of course the dramatic element was at first not perfectly pure. The action and the speeches of the persons represented, were still frequently interwoven with *antiphonæ* and *responsoria*, which merely narrated facts in the words of the Scriptures. Even after the Mysteries passed from the Latin into the popular idiom, passages like these still occur. For instance, the two Easter-plays published by V. Luzarche—the first of which is written in a very simple style and is still for the most part musical, the second of which was however no longer acted in the church, but on an open space in front of the church door—contain several Latin hymns which were sung by a choir. And in a Passion-play, half Latin and half German, from a manuscript of the thirteenth century (in Hoffmann, *loc. cit.*) after the speeches of Martha and of Mary Magdalene, where they complain to the Lord that He was not with them to save their brother from death, it is expressly pre-

It cannot be exactly determined at what period these representations were first introduced, or how rapidly they became transformed into the actual drama; this seems to have been different in different countries. In general the origin of Mysteries coincides with the beginning of the Crusades and with the development of the plastic arts, that is, it belongs to the second half of the eleventh and to the commencement of the twelfth century. France, however, appears to have a well-founded claim to priority in this respect; the predilection and talent of the French people for plays and dramatic representations, their innate love of form, the restlessness and elasticity of the French national character, seem in this case to have first matured the germs of dramatic art. At all events Mysteries are found in France as early as the eleventh century, whereas we have no trace of them in Germany, England, or Spain till the twelfth century. The 'Mystère de la Nativité' and the four Latin Mysteries—the first two of which treat of the Adoration of the Magi, and the Murder of the Innocents at Bethlehem, the last two of the Resurrection of Christ and His meeting the disciples on the road to Emmaus—prove that in France Mysteries were performed not only at Easter, but also at Christmas, as early as the eleventh century. In France, moreover, the first ecclesiastico-dramatical representations seem not only to have treated of Biblical subjects, but also of the lives of the saints; thus the dramatic element appears to have been developed from two different quarters. The first piece, in the collection edited by F. Michel, which in the old manuscript bears the

scribed: *et sic tacendo Clerus cantet: 'Videns Dominus fientes sorores, Lazari ad monumentum lacrimatus est coram Judæis et clamabat.* Several passages like this occur in the above mentioned play, which is certainly older than the MS. in which it exists. However, it is just such interpolations which distinctly prove the manner, spoken of above, in which the so-called Mysteries arose out of divine worship itself (compare the description of the feast of the Resurrection, from a Zurich MS., of the year 1260 in Mone, *l.c.*, p. 9). Hence it is not probable that, as J. Grimm thought, the so-called Mysteries did not at first originate in the Church, but out of the 'very ancient heathen or secular partiality for plays, which found its way into the Church;' for the most ancient plays of this kind were still performed in the Latin language (See Koberstein, *l.c.*, p. 405, note).

title of *Oc de mulieribus*, and represents the parable of the Foolish Virgins, is, in my opinion, directly connected with the so-called *Epistolæ farsitæ*, and is in itself perhaps nothing but a development of the *epistola farsita* with more of a dramatic form. This supposition is supported not only by the character of the whole piece, the rather regular exchange of passages from the Bible in Latin and verses with couplets in the Langue d'Oc, as also by the musical signs, which in the old manuscript are given throughout above the text, but more especially by the sudden transition from the parable of the Foolish Virgins to the Christological prophecies of the Old Testament. The 'Ludus super iconia S. Nicolai,' by Hilarius, from the twelfth century, and published by Champollion-Figeac, seems to be merely a dramatised *epistola farsita*. At least, here too, the actual speeches in Latin alternate with refrains in the Romano-French dialect.* But the *epistolæ farsitæ* which were common in France, at least as early as the eleventh century, were chants sung alternately by the deacon and two ecclesiastics, or, according to others, by the clergy and the congregation, in which the former used the Latin, the latter the vernacular, in relating the acts and sufferings of a saint (more frequently those of Saint Stephen and S. Nicholas); they had probably originated out of the so-called *prose* (edifying descriptions from the life and the miracles of the saints, several of which are contained in the rituals of the eleventh and twelfth centuries).†

The *epistolæ farsitæ*, moreover, appear to have been the means of introducing the language of the people into the Mysteries. For when these became more and more dramatised, it probably became the custom to let the people take part in the representation by giving musical responses, and the popular idiom thus gradually passed over into the actual Mysteries. This, in the first place, gave

* Also, No. 1, in Wright's *Early Mysteries*, p. 3, sq., likewise a Miracle play of Saint Nicholas and belonging to the twelfth century, with its repetition of the lines, makes the impression of a mere alternating chant among the acting persons. Yet it is Latin throughout.

† Jubinal, i. p. 9, Ideler, *Geschichte der Altfranz. Nat.-Liter.*, p. 228.

rise to those plays in which the language of the Church alternates with the profane dialects in a confused medley.* Moreover, the increasing fondness of the people, and of the priests themselves, for these representations, the greater development and more complicated construction which gradually surrounded these latter, and which rendered the whole performance unintelligible without the knowledge of the words (thus thwarting the object which the Church had intended), and lastly, the participation of the laity in the representation no doubt essentially contributed to the addition of a paraphrase in the vernacular. This paraphrase was in the first instance placed side by side with the interpolated Latin lines not already known from the liturgy, and afterwards by the side of the liturgical passages themselves,† and this in the end gradually resulted in the Latin disappearing entirely from the plays.

The more the dramatic element developed towards a more perfect purity, the more the musical element, which had at first predominated, necessarily disappeared. Many of the oldest Mysteries in the old MSS. are furnished throughout with musical signs, and, to judge from these, they were doubtless not spoken but chanted. Yet there seems from the very beginning to have been a difference in the musical recitation, which in the old MSS. is indicated by the expressions *dicere* and *cantare*. This is the case in the above-mentioned old Passion-play,‡ for, although with few exceptions there are musical signs above the text throughout, still it has alternately : *hic Magdalena cantet, hic Jesus cantando*, etc., but, as frequently, *Zachæus dicit, Jesus respondet, Phariseus dicat*, etc.§ This was probably the same difference as has existed at all times in the Catholic

* Several examples of this are given in Michel, Hoffmann, and Mone, in the works already referred to.

† See No. 7 in Mone, p. 72 sq.

‡ See Hoffmann, p. 245.

§ We find the same distinction between the *cantare* and *dicere* in the old Latin Mysteries of French origin (Monmerqué and Wright, *l.c.*) which treat of Biblical subjects, and with which those in Pez and Mone from the German MSS. have the greatest similarity in style and character, except that they are more detailed and more dramatically developed. This is especially the case with No. 1, 'Herodis s. magorum Adoratio' in Wright, *l.c.*, pp. 21-28. But the *dicere* greatly

liturgy between a more recitative and a more melodious, modulating, or chanting delivery. The more the Mysteries became something apart from the actual service of the Church and were a special addition, the more it seems that the musical recital passed over into simple declamation, that the latter became the chief performance, and that the chant or song (as in the case of our so-called melodramas or vaudevilles), was merely an interpolation. In this respect, also, France appears to have led the way; the French have little talent for music, but all the more for rhetoric. Still, as long as the Mysteries remained in the hands of the clergy, the musical element seems in all cases to have retained a more or less important part. It is very likely that it was not till the time of its transition from its original home in the bosom of the Church, and its entering the free wide world, that the Mystery completely cast aside its musical shroud, and took the form of the recitative drama, even though with the occasional insertion of songs.

This transition is of the utmost importance for the development of the Mysteries, and consequently for the history of dramatic art. It seems to have occurred in different ways at different times in different countries. One cause or occasion lay in the first instance in the degenerate manner in which the Mysteries were now sometimes represented, even by the priests themselves. As early as the year 1210 Pope Innocent III.* prohibited the degenerate *ludi theatrales*, with obscene gestures, rude jokes, and monstrous masks from being performed in the churches, and the clergy from taking part in them. The more dramatised the Mysteries became, and the greater the skill demanded for their representation, the more the clergy themselves not only permitted, but claimed the participation of the laity; hence the latter no longer merely joined the choir but began also to take part in the performance. It thus came to pass that the so-called *homines vagi*, that is, the wandering jugglers (*jongleurs*),

predominates, a proof that the musical element began to decrease in the French Mysteries, probably as early as the twelfth century.

* 'Corp. Jur. Canon, LC.'

dancers, mummers and jesters by profession, broke through the wall which until then had separated them from the Church; they soon found their services enlisted on account of their skill in music, their readiness in making jokes, and their mimic and dramatic talents, and became indispensable for certain parts, such as the merchant, the mountebank or doctor. These people in very early times, that is, from their first appearance soon after the migration of nations, had connected themselves with the mementoes of ante-Christian times which still existed among the people, and with the remains of heathen customs and religious ideas. They also practised quackery and sorcery, and not only continued to recite ancient legends and mythological tales in their songs, but also in their so-called cures made use of ancient rites, and ancient forms of sorcery and exorcisms. But they also played all kinds of pranks with the ancient divinities, they represented them in masks and disguises, and as early as the twelfth century appear to have laid the foundation of the Mummings which subsequently became so popular.* Soon after this the young men in the larger towns imitated these Mummings and mimic jokes; this gradually gave rise to the carnival plays, and the people began to take more and more pleasure in masquerades and spectacular plays. When, therefore, the ecclesiastical plays were first accepted, and the popular wit had taken hold of them, it was natural that they were soon no longer performed in the confined space of churches, but acted in the streets and in the open places, at first with the co-operation of the clergy. By degrees the latter may have withdrawn their assistance entirely, and the plays may have been given on festivals by the members of the companies and guilds independently of the clergy.

This was no doubt generally the course of events. At first the Mysteries appear to have thereby gained considerably in artistic development, in form and substance, without losing their plastic, solemn, moral, and religious character. In my opinion, at all events, it is chiefly the transition of the Mystery from the Church into the hands

* Compare Grimm: *Deutsche Mythologie*, Ed. 1st, p. 288 f.

of the people, that explains the great and (as it seems) the sudden progressive development which commenced in Germany with the fourteenth century. This is evident from the plays preserved from that period.* In the thirteenth century it was only some of the principal events from Sacred History, such as the Passion, the so-called Lament of Mary Magdalene, and the Resurrection of Christ, that were represented, and these in general gave briefly the chief features from the Bible. in the fourteenth century, however, we already find cyclical and artistically arranged compositions embracing the whole life and sufferings of Christ, from His baptism upwards, or at all events, the complete story of His childhood. The Biblical substance was expanded by freely invented characters, such as Rufus, the wife of Pilate, etc.; the whole piece received more action and dramatic animation. It was natural that with the disappearance of the clerical and liturgic restraints, such as the consideration of locality and the person of the actor, the spirit should take a freer flight, and that artistic interests should come more prominently forward, even though, as seems generally to have been the case, the priests themselves wrote the plays, and assisted in the representation. But it was also a matter of course that this resulted in the complete secularisation of the ecclesiastical drama. This, however, did not take place in Germany till the fifteenth century; it was not till that time† that Mysterics had become pretty much the same thing as the drama nowadays is to the majority of the public, a mere play for the entertainment of the idle crowd; this interest at all events decidedly predominated.

It was again in France that the change first took place and proceeded most rapidly, and this probably occurred as early as the twelfth century; it also seems as if special circumstances had greatly contributed to this change, more particularly the origin of the so-called *confréries*. The thirteenth century already shows us that the drama there was completely free from ecclesiastical influences. It is only a few of the extant plays which treat of religious

* See Mone, *l.c.*, Nos. 7, 8, and the *Altdeutschen Schauspiele*, Quedlinb. 1841, which he published previously

† As in the example given in Hoffmann, p. 296 ff.

subjects: all, with the exception of a single one which, according to Muratori, was performed by the clergy at the court of the Patriarch, are written in the vulgar tongue, and already bear a character very different from that of the old Mysteries. Achille Jubinal* finds the cause of this rapid revolution in the decay of feudalism, that is, of chivalry and of the Church, and in the simultaneous appearance of the third estate in the twelfth century. In this same century the laity of the burgher class formed themselves into the above-mentioned *confréries*, which were instituted for charitable and pious purposes, and were at first earnest and dignified without in the slightest degree opposing the Church. But even in the next century they partly deprived the clergy of the influence they had until then possessed, and in the fourteenth century they had almost completely paralysed this influence. These brotherhoods appear to have taken possession of the ecclesiastical drama at an early date, and to have remodelled it according as they themselves adopted a secular tendency and a freer character. This most likely took place as early as the second half of the thirteenth century, for even in 1285 (according to others not till 1303) was founded the *Confrérie bouffonne de la Basoche*, its name clearly enough expressing its object and character. It was succeeded in the course of the following century by others of a similar kind, such as the corporation of the *Enfants sans Souci*, the *Confrérie de la Mère folle de Dijon*, the *Société des fous de Clèves*. They occupied themselves, it seems, more especially with the representation of plays and popular entertainments of every description; the *Confrères de la Passion* of Vincennes, at all events, received express permission by a patent from Charles VI., in 1402, to give performances in Paris of *Comédies pieuses*, called *Moralités et Mystères*, such as they had played in Vincennes. They accordingly removed to Paris, where they established the first closed theatre. The representation of Mysteries soon passed over from these brotherhoods into the hands of companies and guilds; in the year 1313, on the occasion of the festival given by Philip the Fair, the weavers acted religious

* A. Jubinal, *l.c.*, i. p. xxi. ff.

plays, in which Adam and Eve, Pontius Pilate, etc., were represented.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the French Mysteries of the thirteenth century already manifest more of a secular than of an ecclesiastical character. For instance, the play of Jehan Bodel, from the middle of the thirteenth century, entitled the *Jus de S. Nicholai*,* treats of the same subject that is represented in the old play of Hilarius; but whereas the latter keeps strictly to the old and simple legend and to the *prose* of the rituals of the Church, Bodel arbitrarily changes the scene, intersperses allusions to the Crusades, which are just being started, even representing the first act in the middle of a Crusade, and invents various scenes from popular life, which are given in the popular jargon, &c. The plays of his contemporaries, Adam de la Halle and others, are of a similar character, and those belonging to the fourteenth century appear already to be entirely fictitious compositions; this may be said especially of the *Miracle de Notre Dame d'Amis et d'Amille*, and of a somewhat later play,† likewise a Miracle Play of the Holy Virgin, the deliverance of a woman from death by burning, which is a faithful description of French popular life in the fourteenth century, and already depicts the manners and customs of the people with much drastic truth. Still, it seems that in France, as everywhere else, in addition to the plays performed by the people, the brotherhoods, the companies and guilds, others also were given which directly proceeded from the priesthood, or in which at least priests took part. The latter would naturally differ essentially from the former, and have preserved an earnest and more religious character.‡

* Monmerqué and Michel, *l.c.*, p. 162 ff.

† Monmerqué and Michel, *l.c.*, p. 327 ff.

‡ Hence, in the fifteenth century we in France still meet with religious plays in the old strict style. The plays in the first portion of Jubinal's collection, especially 'Le Martire de S. Etienne,' 'La Conversion de St. Pol,' 'La Conversion de St. Denis,' 'Le Martire de S. Père et S. Pol,' and others—unless they are perhaps mere translations from old Latin originals—seem, by their religious earnestness, their parænetic tone and their strict fidelity to the Bible histories, to be closely allied to the earliest ecclesiastical Mysteries. Those of the second portion, however, especially No. 1, 'La Nativité de N. S.

I have entered somewhat more fully than appears necessary into the course of the development of Mysteries in Germany and France, partly because it cannot, from the investigations yet made, be traced as accurately in England during that period, and in all probability was nevertheless essentially the same, and partly because the first beginnings of the religious plays in England point to France. English literature is extremely rich in Mysteries or Miracle Plays, from the time when the religious play had already passed into the hands of the laity, more especially into those of the trading companies; but of earlier plays it possesses scarcely anything. For even the Miracle Play of the 'Harrowing of Hell,'* although it belongs to a MS. of the reign of Edward II., and, to judge from language and style, is doubtless the oldest extant English Mystery, yet can scarcely represent the time of the transition from the old ecclesiastical into the popular mode of treatment, much less, then, the old ecclesiastical style itself. It appears rather to be a single extant example of those pieces which were still performed, perhaps by priests, perhaps by the laity, but at all events without any connection with the service of the Church, on some festival (perhaps on Easter Sunday), as an addition to the solemnities. This is evident, even from the fact that it has a prologue, which announces the performance and its subject; moreover, it is devoid of all liturgic elements, devoid of songs, devoid of Biblical quotations, a mere conversation between Satan and Christ, and between the latter and Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, Moses, and John the Baptist. There is a total want of any reference to worship, as in the case of all other extant English Mysteries. This perhaps explains the fact that English historians of literature generally have incorrect ideas about the origin of the so-called Miracle Plays. Warton † wavers between the views of Voltaire, who refers

Jhésuchrist, have a strong inclination to run into the above-mentioned popular colouring, although upon the whole they are less dramatic, more particularly Nos. 3 and 4, where the Biblical events are expanded and prolonged to an intolerable degree.

* Recently published by Halliwell, 1840.

† *History of Engl. Poetry*, ii. p. 366 f., edit 4to.

the origin of Mysteries to Gregory of Nazianzus (as the supposed author of the already mentioned *Χριστὸς πάσχειν*), and the opinion of another Frenchman (Du Tilliot), according to which it was the priests of the Middle Ages who instituted the representation of Mysteries, in order to withdraw the people from frivolous amusements (such as dances, plays and mummings) which more especially attracted them at the time of the annual fairs. Percy finds the origin of Mysteries in the so-called Dumbshows, the French *Drames muets*,* pantomimic performances which were at first interspersed with a few short speeches, but gradually became a series of connected dialogues, and finally were divided into acts and scenes.† Others, like Marriott,‡ confound the commencement of the modern theatre with those old attempts connected with the ancient drama, and pronounce Ezechiel to be the first dramatist of the Christian era. Collier § endeavours to adjust the two views set forth by Warton, and believes that Gregory of Nazianzus was 'the inventor' of Mysteries, but that ecclesiastics may have used them at a later period to reform the people, and to introduce among them a convenient knowledge of the Scriptures. G. L. Craik || considers it probable that the original object of Mysteries was to instruct the people in religious matters. Its natural development out of the service of the Catholic Church has, so far as I know, never been recognised by any English historian of literature much less, then, has it been proved by them.

The first certain trace of Miracle Plays in England belongs to the commencement of the twelfth century, about the year 1110. At that time Geoffroy, a member of the University of Paris and still a layman (after the year 1119 Abbot of St. Albans), exhibited a dramatic play from the life of St. Catherine, and obtained dresses and stage decorations for the occasion from the vestry of the priory; this happened during his stay in St. Albans, to which

* Of which, according to Michel, i. p. xxx., traces first occur in the fourteenth century.

† 'Reliques of ancient Engl. Poetry,' Tauchnitz edition, i. pp. 106 f.

‡ *I c.*, p. ix.

§ ii. 126.

|| 'Sketches of the History of Literature and Learning in England,' t. iii., p. 17.

place he had been invited from Normandy by the abbot of the time to teach in the school belonging to the priory.* This statement, which is related by Matthew Paris (about 1240) in his account of the lives of the abbots of St. Albans, shows, in the first place, that such plays must at that time, in England, have as yet been something new; further, that it was a layman and a Frenchman who first introduced them; and lastly, that the first actors, in this case at least also, were not priests, but laymen,† otherwise it would not have been necessary for Geoffroy to borrow the caps and dresses from the vestry of the priory. Now, although Mysteries were doubtless played by the English clergy as early as the twelfth century (as is proved by the remark made by William Fitzstephen, who wrote in the year 1182);‡ nay, although it is probable that the ecclesiastical drama at this time in England also was still almost exclusively in the hands of the clergy, yet the above fact shows how early French influence set the example in England of a Mystery being represented by laymen—an example which could hardly have remained without lasting consequences.

I believe, at least, that those so-called Chester Plays, which can be traced historically back to the year 1268, and which from that date down to 1577 were given in Chester annually—with some interruptions—at Whitsuntide, were exhibited outside the church, even if they were performed with the co-operation of the priests. After what Collier§ mentions, it can scarcely be doubted that these religious plays were originally written in the French language, and probably not translated into English till the year 1338 (perhaps by Ralph Higden). The still existing collection published by Wright, not only in several passages has French verses which suddenly interrupt the English dialogue,|| but also frequently shows traces of a translation of separate pieces from the French,

* Collier, i. 3.

† Sharp, *l.c.*, without giving any reason, calls them 'novices of the priory.'

‡ Collier, i. 1 ff.

§ II., 129 ff.; compare Wright 'Chester Plays,' p. xiii. ff.

|| For example, pp. 101, 148, 152.

or at least of a close connection with the French models.* Hence the plays in this collection, even if they were subsequently expanded and altered in various ways, in their earliest elements most probably extend back to the first half of the fourteenth century, perhaps as far as the thirteenth. Now these plays cannot possibly have been exhibited in the church, for, in the first place, according to the MSS. in which they are preserved (though belonging to the sixteenth century), they had evidently long been in the possession of the trading companies of Chester. But in the next place, and this is the main point, they have throughout such a secular, popular stamp that they cannot possibly have originated out of ecclesiastical Mysteries by mere expansion and remodelling, but must have been newly composed at a later period; in which case, however, the French verses would be inexplicable. In addition to this, according to two perfectly trustworthy testimonies of contemporaries,† as early as the thirteenth century, *Miracula* or *Miracles*‡ were played outside the church, on meadows, public streets and in churchyards, before the mass of the people; and, moreover, plays of a very popular character, for it is expressly remarked that the assembled multitude sometimes burst out into peals of laughter. We may, therefore, suppose that in England, by means of French influence, the religious play had become a popular amusement as early as the thirteenth century, although for a long time (as late as 1492), together with these—as is evident from the investigations of Sharp§—there were also ecclesiastical plays which, no doubt, adhered more strictly to the old clerical style of Mystery; of these, however, unfortunately, no examples have as yet been discovered.

Be that as it may, at all events the three great collections of Miracle Plays, in which English literature possesses the first beginnings of her drama, bear distinct traces—from internal and external indications—that, for

* Wright, *l.c.*, p. xiv.

† Wright, *l.c.*, p. ix. f.

‡ In France we pretty constantly find a distinction made between the expressions *Miracles* and *Mystères*, that is, between plays which treat of the life and miracles of saints, and such as represent Bible stories. In England, however, a *Miracle Play* is the general term given to both species.

§ Sharp, *l.c.*, 6 ff., and Collier, ii. 141 f.

the most part, at least, they were originally produced beyond the confines of the church. It is only in regard to the collection bearing the title of 'Ludi Coventriæ,' and published by Halliwell, that there can be any doubt on this point. In Coventry, at all events, since the year 1392, and with few interruptions down to 1591, there were annual exhibitions of religious plays by the guilds and trading companies, plays which, as it seems, included the whole history of the New Testament (of subjects from the Old Testament there is not a trace), and concluded with a representation of the Last Judgment, as Sharp has pointed out. But the Grey Friars were also in the habit of performing Mysteries there, and these were so far-famed that in 1492 Henry VII. came expressly to Coventry to see these plays.* This gives rise to the question:—Were the plays in the collection referred to—if Coventry was their birth-place, which, moreover, may be regarded as certain from the language with the regularly recurring provincialisms, for instance, *x* for *sh*—acted by the trading companies or by the Grey Friars? The old MS. belongs to the year 1468, and was formerly in the possession of Sir Robert Cotton.† If we agree with the remark which Cotton's Librarian, Dr. Richard James, made upon it, there can be no doubt that the plays, as James says, were? *scenice expressa et actitata olim per monachos sive fratres mendicantes*; hence, originally of ecclesiastical origin. Besides this there is the fact that the only pageant‡ preserved in the books of the trading companies of Coventry, and which has been published by Sharp,§ represents the Birth of Christ, the Salutations of the Shepherds, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Flight to Egypt; it was played by the Shearmen and Tailors' Company, and differs completely from the plays (Nos. xii. and xv.) of the 'Ludi Coventriæ,' which treat of the same subject. The Leet-books of the companies, moreover, occasionally give the names of the persons who

* Sharp, *l.c.*, p. 6.

† Halliwell, p. vi.

‡ Pageant is the old English and popular name given to these Miracle Plays which were acted upon temporary stages. The word is probably a corruption of *Peqma* (from *πῆγμα*), and originally applied only to the scaffold or *échafaud*, upon which the pieces were played on in the streets.

§ Sharp, *l.c.*, p. 3.

took part in the pageants, for instance, those of the Cappers' Company,* but these do not agree with the characters in the corresponding plays of our collection.

Still, it is difficult to come to the conclusion that all of these plays—in the form in which they appear in our collection—should ever have been represented by priests, even if they were the later and very depraved followers of Saint Francis; at least by far the greater portion of them have too much of a vulgar character for such a supposition. For the collection is divided not merely externally, but also internally, according to spirit and character, into two very unequal parts. At the conclusion of the thirteenth play † the assembled audience is dismissed in a kind of epilogue, spoken by 'Contemplatio,' and invited to be present at the continuation of the play at Easter. Hence, the first thirteen pieces must be distinct from those following, and must have been performed at a different time.‡ The first thirteen plays, moreover, differ considerably from those following in style and character. In the first place, the treatment is not nearly so dramatic; the subjects (seven from the Old Testament, and six from the life of the Virgin Mary, down to her visit to Elizabeth) are chosen without regard to their scenic and dramatic capabilities, and consequently are, for the most part, merely narratives of what has happened or is to happen, together with long lyric effusions of thanksgiving, praise and glory to God; the dialogues are usually short and disjointed. But, on the other hand, the character of the plays is far more serious, solemn and religious. In the constantly recurring prayers, and the frequent exhortations of the actors one to another to live in a manner pleasing to God, it is distinctly apparent that the object of the plays is to give religious and moral instruction. The musical element, also, which, as we have seen, predominated in the earliest ecclesiastical Mysteries, occupies in this case a far more important part. In almost every play we meet with a couple of Latin hymns, generally lines and verses from the Bible belonging to the

* Sharp, pp. 13, 36, 43, 66.

† p. 130.

‡ At the beginning of Nos. viii. and xxix. a fresh opportunity is taken of saluting and exhorting the public by a prologue, but it is less distinctly apparent.

liturgy; in No. viii * it is expressly prescribed: 'Here the sequence is to be sung, *Benedicta sit beata Trinitas*,' and at the conclusion of No. xiii. we read: 'Let us sing to Our Lady, *Ave Maria cœlorum*.' In all of the other plays (with the exception of No. xli., which, to judge from the MS., belongs to the latter part of the reign of Henry VIII.) there are only four passages where a hymn has been inserted or prescribed. Lastly, the form of the language, also, seems to support the supposition that the first thirteen plays are older, or rather that they have remained more unchanged and were written by a more cultivated hand: the versification is more accurate, more regular and more rhythmically perfect than in the following pieces; Latin passages occur more frequently, and in a less corrupted form; the expression is more refined, dignified and cultivated. The numerous quotations from the Bible and the adoration of the Virgin Mary, which is prominent throughout, betray that the author was an ecclesiastic of the old Catholic persuasion. I therefore have no hesitation in maintaining that the first thirteen plays are remains of the old ecclesiastical Mysteries, which were originally performed by the Grey Friars, and although they may not have been preserved in their original form, are imitations of the old ecclesiastical drama.

What we have to think of the following plays † depends upon a comparison of them with the collection of Chester Plays and the Towneley Mysteries, which were undoubtedly played by trading companies. When compared with these, even the later plays exhibit a greater earnestness and a more dignified character; some of them ‡ appear even to be closely allied to the first thirteen. I therefore conjecture that they also originated in the Capuchin monastery of Coventry, but at a time when either the degenerate Mendicant Friars themselves travelled about the district and exhibited their theatrical arts for money and charitable gifts, or at least had their pageants performed by laymen, perhaps by the young men belonging to the companies, perhaps by jugglers and strolling players.

* p. 73.

† Nos. xiv.-xxvii. and Nos. xxviii.-xl.

‡ For example, Nos. xxxvi.-xl.

This supposition alone explains how it is that the prologue which enumerates all the separate plays, specifies their actual contents, and yet has the object of announcing the performance to the people several days previously, can end with the words:

‘ A Sunday next, yf that we may,
At vi. of the belle we gynne our play,
In N. town, wherefore we pray,
That God now be your spede. Amen.’

The N. (*nomen*) evidently fills the blank in which the name of the town where the representation was about to take place, had, on every occasion, to be inserted by the standard-bearers who recited the prologue. Hence, when this prologue was composed, the collection was meant to serve as an amusement to the inhabitants of various places. It is also evident from the scenic directions, that the plays (at least those from No. xiv. downwards) were acted on platforms or scaffolds, and therefore probably outside the church, for there is no trace of scaffolds having been erected for performances in churches. Lastly, it is very likely that from the time when plays were prohibited in places of worship (and when at the same time the trading companies of Coventry were in the habit of regularly exhibiting their pageants at the feast of Corpus Christi, and on other festivals) that the Grey Friars of Saint Francis looked out for another place for their dramatic performances, and hence may have given representations in other towns in the neighbourhood.

Although the Towneley collection belongs to an older MS., I was obliged to speak of the Coventry Plays first, because I am convinced, for reasons stated above, that many of them are older than those of the Towneley and Chester collections, at all events in the form in which the latter now exist. The Towneley Mysteries derive their name from the family Towneley in Lancashire, who were in possession of the MS. from an early date, and into whose hands it has again returned. The MS. is the most ancient of all the three collections, and belongs to the time of Henry VII. From a description of the female dresses given in one of the plays, it may, as Hunter* points out,

* p. viii.

safely be assumed that some, and perhaps the majority of the plays, were originally written towards the end of the fourteenth century. In addition to this, the words with which Magnus Herodes concludes his pageant, 'I can no more Franche' (p. 153), point to a period in which it was still customary for royalty and the aristocracy to speak French. The home of these plays was no doubt Yorkshire, and more especially Wakefield or Woodkirk, a retreat of the Augustine monks in the neighbourhood of Wakefield, a dependency of the great House of St. Oswald at Nostel. This is evident not merely from the language, which exhibits many peculiarities of the Yorkshire dialect, but especially from some observations which are found added at the commencement of different plays, and which clearly show that they were performed by the trading companies of Wakefield; for instance, by the tanners, glovemakers, and fishermen companies.* Only some of the plays form an exception to this: the 'Processus Prophetarum,' to judge from the language, is more modern, and differs both in style and structure from the other; the 'Pharao,' 'Cæsar Augustus,' and the 'Annunciatio,' also seem to have been written by a different hand; at least, there is no trace of a Yorkshire dialect in any of these three plays.

The Towneley collection, therefore, was most probably in the hands of the companies of Wakefield at the same time that—as can be proved—the trading companies of Coventry performed their pageants, that is, as early as the second half of the fourteenth century. The character of the collection corresponds with this. Most of the plays are written in such a secular and popular style that they were evidently originally intended for the amusement of the people. The most popular ones, but those which at the same time exhibit the greatest amount of drastic animation, are the two shepherd pageants,† especially the second,‡ in which the Adoration of the Shepherds is completely lost sight of by the representation of a case of country sheep-stealing and its discovery. But even the 'Judicium,'§ in which the devils, and more especially

* Hunter, pp. viii.-xvi.
‡ p. 98 f.

† pp. 84-120.
§ p. 305 f.

Tutivillus, not without wit, show up and ridicule all kinds of follies, failings, and vices of the day, further the 'Processus Noe cum filiis,'* the 'Magnus Herodes,'† and others are distinguished by their freshness and skilful treatment. The religious character has almost entirely disappeared; it is only some plays, such as those entitled 'Abraham,' 'Isaac,' 'Jacob,' the 'Purificatio Mariæ,' the 'Pagina Doctorum,' and especially the 'Processus Prophetarum,' which by their more severe character and parænetic tendency remind one of their ecclesiastical origin, and religious basis. In like manner, the musical element has almost entirely disappeared; it is also only in the more seriously sustained 'Thomas Indiæ,' that we once or twice meet with the words: *Tunc venit Jesus et cantat: Pax vobis est*; and in the 'Ascensio Domini,'‡ there occurs a hymn of the angels. Very strange is the mixture of Latin and English in which Pilate speaks at the beginning of the 'Processus Talentorum.'§ This, together with the stage directions, which are almost always given in Latin, prove that the plays can scarcely have been written by members of the trading companies, but that in all probability they were originally composed by monks or priests, perhaps even performed under their supervision and co-operation; demonstrable examples of which, according to Collier,|| occur not only in England, but, according to Jubinal,¶ in France, as late as in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.** The two shepherd pageants, also, which treat the same subject, the Adoration of the Shepherds, in different ways, show that the plays were remodelled or rewritten for new representations at an early period. This is likewise apparent from some memoranda in the books of the trading companies of

* p. 20 f.

† p. 140 f.

‡ p. 300.

§ p. 233.

|| ii. 142 f. 146.

¶ i. pp. xlviii. f.; ii. p. viii. ff.

** This is also corroborated by the historical fact that, as late as 1426 in York, William Melton, of the order of the *fratres minores*, not only urgently recommended the representation of Mysteries, which the trading companies of York exhibited annually, but that in the ancient record he is expressly designated as Professor of holy Pageantry, that is surely, as the author or teacher and director (*régisseur*) of the performances. Sharp, p. 133.

Coventry.* These facts confirm the opinion that the plays were written at different periods, and that they may extend back into the fourteenth century.

It is much the same in regard to the Chester Plays. In their first beginnings perhaps the most ancient, yet to judge from the MS. in which the collection has been preserved, they are not merely the latest—the five different MSS. belong respectively to the years 1591, 1592, 1600, 1605 and 1607 †—but in the form in which we now have them, the date of their composition scarcely extends beyond the beginning of the fifteenth century. Some of the plays may even be of a still later origin. The character of the whole collection is closely related to the Towneley Mysteries. Here also we find a shepherd pageant, ‡ giving a pretty correct and lively picture of English country life at that time; here also we find many traits of coarse and popular comedy; here also Herodes is a caricatured tyrant, storming about the stage, with oaths and abusive language. Of singing we here also find but few traces (only the angels sing the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the Virgin Mary the *Magnificat*); besides this, it is only twice that we find on the margin the words: ‘here a song,’ but in place of these we more frequently find the stage direction: ‘Minstrells Playinge.’ However, we not unfrequently meet with verses from the Bible in Latin, and the stage directions are given in Latin, so that probably these plays also were originally written by priests and only subsequently remodelled.

All three collections, accordingly, agree pretty well in spirit and character; if the first thirteen and some others of the Coventry Plays are left out of consideration we find no essential deviations. Even the external form of the representation must have been pretty much the same in all cases. In this respect the Leet-books of the companies of Coventry and a few reports of eye-witnesses (belonging, it is true, to a later period) furnish the necessary material for giving us a clear idea of the representation. The stage, likewise called ‘pageant,’ consisted of a high

* Sharp, pp. 36, 112. An example of a similar kind in Germany, in Mone, *l.c.*, p. 273.

† Wright, p. xx.

‡ p. 119 ff.

scaffolding upon four wheels, and possessed two rooms, an upper and a lower one; in the latter the actors dressed, upon the upper one they gave their representation. Frequently, as the plays themselves show, several such stages had to be erected one beside the other, so that the actors could repair from one to the other, that is to say, from one town or district to another.* Every larger company or guild had its own 'pageant,' upon which it performed its own play, at its own expense (it was only the smaller companies which united in order to prepare and exhibit a pageant). These moveable stages were drawn about the streets. In Chester, for instance, the first play ('The Fall of Lucifer,' performed by the tanners) was commenced early in the morning in front of the gates of the abbey, and after the piece had been played there, the waggon was wheeled to the High Cross in front of the mayor's house, and thence further through the different streets, till all pieces appointed for the day had been played out. The waggons belonging to the different companies separated at the appointed places of exhibition, and every company always repeated its own play, so that all the plays were performed at all the different stations. This is the report given by Archdeacon Rogers, an eyewitness in the second half of the sixteenth century.† The total number of the plays, according to the same authority, was twenty-four, which agrees with the number of the companies by which they were played; and this number is likewise again met with in the extant collection which at the same time specifies in every play the guild which exhibited the piece. Whitsuntide was the time of the year when the regular annual representations were given in Chester; in Coventry, however, it was at the feast of Corpus Christi. This appears to have been the appointed day for the exhibitions in most of the other English towns where plays of this kind were performed; for instance, at Skinners' Hall in London, in Newcastle-on-Tyne, in York,

* In France there appears to have been but one scaffold, which was, however, divided into three storeys, every one of which represented either a town or a province; the uppermost one no doubt also represented paradise, the middle one purgatory, and the lowest one hell, according to the requirements of the piece. Jubinal, i. p. xli.

† Sharp, p. 17 ff.

Leeds, Dublin, and Edinburgh,*—a proof that the origin of the plays in these places most probably does not extend farther back than the end of the thirteenth or the commencement of the fourteenth century. For, as is well known, the feast of Corpus Christi was first introduced into the Church by Urban IV. in 1264. It seems that pageants were not usually exhibited on any other festivals or festive occasions, except under extraordinary circumstances, such as when royalty visited the town.†

The English Miracle Plays are distinguished from those of Germany and France by their effort towards attaining a certain universality, completeness, and finish of the subject; their object evidently was to embrace all the principal moments of their views of human life. This in the Middle Ages was essentially a religious one: all historical occurrences had a religious significance, and were at the same time divine acts of punishment, advice, and exhortation, and hence were well or ill introduced into the framework of the sacred history of the Old and New Testaments. This history was the normal prototype of all historical occurrences. The taste for historical conception and description, which distinguishes the English people, appears to have originated and developed the ecclesiastical drama, specially, though not quite consciously, from this point of view. To my mind, at least, this partly explains the remarkable fact, that, according to the investigations hitherto made, it was in England alone, and moreover not merely in Wakefield and Chester—as the three large extant collections show—but, according to authentic information, also in York and Newcastle-on-Tyne,‡ and hence probably in other places as well, that the whole sacred story, from the 'Fall of Lucifer' down to the 'Last Judgment,' was represented in a series of plays. The mixture of the religious with the secular, of the sacred with the profane, of Bible history with references to the immediate present, and further, of the serious with the ludicrous, nay, with rude outbursts of popular wit, proceeded no doubt in the first instance from the wish "to make sport and to glad the hearers" (as is expressly said

* Sharp, pp. 121, 133 ff.; compare Collier, i. 11; ii. 139 f.

† Sharp, pp. 125 f. 145 ff.

‡ Sharp, *l.c.*

in the 'Chester Plays,' p. 1). and was a natural consequence after the Mysteries had passed from the Church into the hands of the people. From this point of view the mixture of the two elements acquires a certain ideal importance. for regarding it in this light sacred history appeared to rise above time and space; it was one continual present; actual life with all its small and great events, was a part of it, and therefore became naturally connected with it. In actual life, as in sacred history, there was a continual struggle between the kingdoms of light and darkness; the devil, in both cases, was an ever present personage. But to the healthy popular mind the evil spirit always appears ridiculous as well; hence the comic parts are in all cases played only by the devil and his demons, or by the dignitaries of his kingdom on earth, such as Herod, Caesar, Augustus, and their servants. (As regards the sacred characters it is only upon Noah, and perhaps upon Joseph, where the latter complains about his imaginary cuckoldom, upon whom a ray of the ludicrous falls.)

The choice of the Biblical events in the three extant collections is the same with but slight deviations. This proves that the Old Testament was drawn into the circle of representations on account of the Fall and the Flood, that is, as the ideal basis of the great fact of the Redemption upon which turn the events of the New Testament. For in all three collections no mention is made of the history of the Jewish nation from the time of Moses; it is only the 'Processus Prophetarum' in the Towneley collection, and 'The Prophets' in the Coventry collection—an arrangement of the genealogy of the House of David—which form the transition from the time of Moses to the birth of Christ. The plays from the New Testament, of which there are a much greater number, give the principal incidents of the life of Christ in chronological order, intermixed with some features from the apocryphal gospels (which are probably subsequent additions to give the charm of novelty to the performances). The story of the Passion of Christ forms the centre, and is treated comparatively far more in detail, almost every step being represented by a separate play. The Resurrection, Christ's

appearing to Mary Magdalene and to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Ascension, the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost (and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in the Coventry collection)—events in which sacred history has already left this earth—form the transition to the Last Judgment, the key-stone to the old and to the beginning of the new world, and which is the last play in all three collections.

Regarded from an artistic point of view, the English plays are the best, especially those of the Towneley and Chester collections; they are superior to the German, and in most cases to the French plays, by their greater drastic animation and a certain skilfulness in the arrangement of the events represented, as well as in the dramatisation of the subject in general. While the German Mysteries, down to the time of the fifteenth century, still continue to show the half lyric, half plastic element (out of which they arose), and endeavour to bring more and more animation into it, as had at first been attempted by the musical performance, and, at a later period, by the poetic expression of the sentiments and contemplation—the English Mysteries, on the other hand, from the very commencement, exhibit more of a dramatic character. Of the long speeches which still frequently occur in the French plays, and of the lyric effusions in which the Germans delight, there are but few and occasional traces, most of which are found in the Coventry collection; the dialogues are better, at least they possess a more rapid and a freer movement, but the main point is that the action is brought more into the foreground. Hence we see that the strong feeling for action, and thus for the vital principle of dramatic art—that genuine dramatic spirit, which the English stage at the time of Shakspeare possessed and fostered—commenced its youthful flight upwards in the first beginnings of the English drama.

The action, however, in all cases and also in the English Mysteries, still bears an essentially *epic* character. It is still a purely external occurrence, the reasons and motives of which lie beyond the stage, nay, generally beyond this earthly life; no action is derived from the life and character of the dramatic personages, or results from pre-

vious conditions and relations; every character appears unexpectedly and unprepared, like an accidental occurrence in nature; every action appears but as the special incident of the plan designed by God in Bible history, and consequently, as in the *epos*, depends more or less upon the invisible threads with which the Divine Power directs the lives of mortals; in short, the action takes place more *for* men than *through* men. The latter are merely tools in the hand of God, or the vessels which have to receive the Divine will, and to carry out the Divine act; the whole story still passes by them, like a mere occurrence, their personal participation consists only in the feeling, sympathy, and receptive activity of their minds; the individuality, the freedom of will, the character of the persons represented, do not come the least into play; in other words, they still have no share in the dramatic construction of the subject. The result of this, however, of necessity also excludes from the dramatic action the other and practical side of religion, *morality*, which presupposes the freedom of the will. Religion—in its one-sided conception of the Deity as acting and suffering for mankind, and as a passive belief on the part of man, who has only to receive what is offered him—rules the whole. It is the next world, according to mediæval idealism, that either absorbs within itself the natural reality of this world, or excludes it from itself by means of a sharp contrast, but in both cases does not allow it to express itself in words.

This one-sidedness of the ecclesiastical plays had to be overcome, if the drama was to advance a step in its development. But the one-sidedness lay in the matter itself, in the first germs, in the inmost essence of the Mysteries. The progress, therefore, could not proceed from a further development of the Mysteries, but required the creation of a new species of drama, by the side of, and in contrast with, the religious plays. It was this new species which appeared in England, as elsewhere, under the name of Moral Plays.

CHAPTER II.

MORALS, OR MORAL PLAYS.

THE rise of these so-called Morals or Moralities about the middle of the fifteenth century, must be regarded as marking an epoch, and the *second period* of the history of the English drama may be dated from this point.

If we wish to comprehend the first germs and elements from which they arose, we must not overlook the fact that, even at an early date, a secular element was added to the oldest ecclesiastico-religious beginnings of dramatic art, to those Mysteries which were written in a strictly ecclesiastical style. When once the love for scenic representations was awakened, the Mysteries were introduced into all kinds of festivities arranged for secular occasions, in honour of, and for the gratification of kings, princes, and the nobility. Profane mummings and mimic plays, as already intimated, were no doubt as old, or even older than Mysteries. They formed, so to speak, the starting point, and received more and more dramatic form and colouring with the development of the religious plays. In the fourteenth century we first meet in France with the *Drame muet*, the English *Dumb-show*, probably the result of the further development of the secular element, even although its matter was frequently taken from Bible History. Simultaneously, and so far as their first elements are concerned, there arose in France the so-called *Entremets*, which soon became so popular with princes and nobles that none of their festivals were allowed to pass without the performance of one of them. According to the accounts that have been preserved regarding these,* they seem at first to have been more calculated to delight the eye, and to have been a species of *tableaux vivants*, with an allegorical significance,

* Jubinal, *l.c.*, i. p. xxx. ff.

gorgeous representations with skilful transformations, grotesque appurtenances within animated scenery, and accompanied by short explanatory speeches; extensive machinery certainly played an important part. Dumb-shows or *entremets* of this kind were probably those plays which were so much in favour with the Court of Edward III., and are mentioned under the name of *Ludi domini regis*; to judge from an extant list of the dresses, masks, etc., required for their representation, they evidently were of a dramatic character.* Similar pieces were ordered by Richard II. in 1389, and in 1401 twelve London aldermen and their sons played a great 'Mummyng' before the king and the Emperor of Constantinople; this also was probably a play in the style of the French *Entremets*.† As in France, so in England, kings and princes were greeted on their arrival in towns and castles by historico-symbolical and allegorical figures, who recited speeches and discoursed in dialogue. Thus in 1377 the citizens of London gave a Mumming in the streets of London 'for the disport of the yong prince Richard, son of the blacke prince;‡ and Queen Margaret, upon her entry into Coventry in 1455, was received by the Prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, and when in the town was at first greeted by St. Edward and St. John, and afterwards in another street by the four Virtues, Righteousness, Temperance, Strength and Prudence, &c.§ The word Interlude or Enterlude is probably but the English translation of the French *Entremet*. The word was in common use as early as the reign of Edward IV.;|| and although we do not know exactly what the term originally signified, yet the circumstance that many of the oldest Moral Plays bear the same name, proves that the Moralities in their first origin very likely arose from these so-called Interludes.

This was, however, but one circumstance which contributed to their origin. On the other hand the Morals, in England at least, no doubt have their roots in religious plays, and appear to be a variety of Mystery. A beginning

* Collier, i. 15.

† Collier, 17.

‡ The same, p. 16 f.

§ Sharp, *l.c.*, p. 145 f.

|| Collier, ii. 271.

was made by introducing the allegorical figures, which formed a part in the secular pageants, into the religious plays, so as to vary and adorn the subject. In the eleventh piece of the Coventry collection,* we already meet with Veritas, Justitia, Pax and Misericordia; in one of the following pieces† Death is personified, and among the personages represented in the pageants of the trading companies we in addition find a representation of 'The Mother of Death,' a personification of Sin.‡ In a later Miracle Play (from the time of Henry VII., to judge from the MS., but probably of a more ancient origin), which treats the story of Mary Magdalene very freely,§ the Devil and the seven deadly sins appear and play the principal parts. Likewise, in a representation of the parables of the Bible, such as the Wise and the Foolish Virgins, as well as in the legends of the later saints, allegorical figures appear at the very commencement in order to render the religious and moral significance of the piece more prominent. When once the taste for allegory had found acceptance, the next step was to express the fundamental idea of Mysteries, the Fall, and the salvation of sinful humanity through the Divine grace (which is very clearly shown in the cyclic composition of the English Miracle Plays) in an allegorical form. This fundamental idea in fact recurs in these earliest English Moralities under various kinds of disguises with such striking persistency, that for this reason also we are obliged to place them in close affinity, that is, to regard them as the intellectual offspring of Mysteries.

Thus, for instance, 'The Castle of Perseverance,' one of the oldest extant Moral Plays (from the time of Henry VI.), commences with a dialogue between Mundus, Caro and Belial, in which they dilate on their respective powers and privileges. When this is finished Humanum Genus appears, just born and naked, and explains who he is. While he is yet speaking, a good and bad angel take their places on his right and left, disputing with one another, and each trying to entice him to their side. Humanum Genus decides in favour of the bad angel, and is

* p. 106.

† No. xix. p. 184.

‡ Sharp, p. 47.

§ Analyzed by Collier, ii. 231 f.

immediately conducted to Mundus, who is conversing with his two friends Stultitia and Voluptas. The latter are commanded to wait and attend upon Humanum Genus. Detractio is likewise bidden to be his companion, and procures him the acquaintance of Avaritia, who thereupon introduces him to the six other deadly sins. The bad angel rejoices, the good one grieves, and at last sends Confessio to Humanum Genus, who, it is true, rejects her at first, as coming too soon, etc. However, by the help of Pœnitentia she succeeds in winning over Humanum Genus. Upon the penitent enquiring where he can dwell in safety, he is taken to the Castle of Perseverance, whereupon the bad angel remarks that Humanum Genus is now forty years of age. When in the castle the seven cardinal virtues are his companions; they are besieged, but unsuccessfully, by the seven deadly sins, headed by Belial. From the lamentations of the latter we learn that they suffer most from the roses which Caritas and Patientia shower upon them, and by which they are beaten black and blue. They ultimately retire discomfited. The siege, however, must have lasted a long time, for we hear that Humanum Genus has in the meantime become "hoary and old." Nevertheless, the struggle is not yet at an end; that which did not succeed by force is now tried by stratagem. Avaritia crawls unperceived beneath the castle walls, and by her artful persuasions finally succeeds in urging Humanum Genus to take to flight. He leaves the castle and lives with Avaritia, but Garcio (a boy), representing the rising generation, demands of him the treasures which he has accumulated with the assistance of Avaritia, alleging that Mundus has given them to him (the rising generation). Thereupon appear Mors and Anima; the former delivers a long speech about the greatness and universality of his power. Anima, on the other hand, calls for the aid of Misericordia; but the bad angel takes Humanum Genus on his back and carries him off to the infernal regions. This gives rise to a quarrel in heaven between Misericordia and Pax on the one hand, and between Justitia and Veritas on the other, the former pleading for, and the latter against Humanum Genus. God, however, decides in favour of the latter; the bad

angel is driven to hell, and God himself concludes the piece with an epilogue, wherein he sets forth the moral.*

Similar in form and substance, but much more simple in character, are several other Moralities which have been preserved in MS. from the times of Henry VI. and Edward IV.; of these Collier† gives a detailed analysis. Down to the commencement of the reign of Henry VIII. the character of these plays appears to vary but little in all essential points. They were dramatic plays in which allegorical figures, personifications of general moral forces, appeared as the dramatic characters, developing, in a symbolical representation, the ideal contents of the Scriptures as understood from their moral point of view.‡ Hence the Devil and Vice (also called Iniquity, Sin, Desire, Hazard), played important parts in the earlier Moralities, the former was represented in a hideous and at the same time a ludicrous form (as in the Miracle Plays), with a long red nose, hairy skin, cloven feet and a tail; while Vice (the prototype of our modern Harlequin) was dressed in a long parti-coloured cloak, with a long wooden sword in his hand, the very impersonation of agility and mischief, whose delight was in bantering, jeering, and belabouring the devil, his usual companion, until the latter, from pain and rage, bursts out into a loud roar.* These two characters had accordingly to provide the fun and amusement, while the principal actors indulged in long, serious, and parænetic speeches. Gradually, however, the link between the Mysteries and the Moralities became loosened, until in the end it was completely severed, and the Moralities—by moving freely and independently in their department, as

* Collier, ii. 279 ff.

† II. 287 f.

‡ Of these most ancient Morals nothing is printed, with the exception of the *Moral Play of Every Man* (in Hawkins); the English manuscripts I have of course not been able to examine. My explanation of the character and course of the development of the English moralities is founded upon the following authorities: Collier: *History*, etc., ii. 258 ff. Hawkins: *Origin*, etc., i. 35 ff. Dodsley: *A Select Collection of Old Plays*, in xii vols. *A New Edition with Notes*, etc., by J. Reed, O. Gilchrist and the Editor (Chalmers), vol. 1 Lond. 1825, xii. 1827. 'John Skelton's *Poetical Works*, with Notes,' etc. by A. Dyce, Lond. 1843, vol. i. *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom; an ancient interlude*, etc., edit. by J. A. Halliwell, Lond. Pr. f. t. Shakes. Soc. 1846.

upon territory of their own—dramatised the whole sphere of morals in all its relations to the daily realities of life, in its symbolico-allegorical form, and without any regard to a religious basis.

The mode of representation, however, generally still remained the same as in the case of the Miracle Plays. The stage was doubtless still devoid of all scenic decoration, and merely draped with tapestry; the dresses, even if occasionally rich, were nevertheless freely chosen, the dramatic personages being characterised only by distinct emblems. However, in the fifteenth century the professional players, who in an imperceptible, or at least an undemonstrable transition, had proceeded from the already mentioned *homines vagi*, the jugglers, dancers, puppet showmen, etc., appear to have become a very numerous class. And as Moralities were very frequently given as Interludes on the festivals of princes and the nobility, we may assume that with these the drama passed more and more from the hands of the clergy, of the *confréries* and of the trading companies into those of the itinerant bands of players. As early as the year 1465, on the occasion of the marriage of a relative of Sir John Howard, afterwards Duke of Norfolk, a company of players gave a dramatic performance, which was very likely a species of Moral Play. This is the oldest known example of those theatrical representations which at a later period were performed so frequently in the residences of the English aristocracy. And yet even Richard III., when Duke of Gloucester, had a special company of players in his service, probably much in the same way as was the custom in later times with many of the wealthier nobility.*

Upon a superficial examination of the artistic value of Moralities, the transition of the drama from the religious sphere into that of morals does not appear to have very considerably promoted the development of dramatic poetry. And yet when regarded more closely, this transition may almost be called a leap, which with one bound transposed the drama from a foreign soil into a domain which belonged to it and was peculiarly its own. For it is, as it were, the transition of the drama from heaven to earth, from the

* Collier, in his Edition of Shakespeare's Works, i. p. xxx. f

next world of the religious conception to the present one of the moral action, from the ideal to the real. It is the same transition, which, in another form, took place in the domain of the plastic arts during the fourteenth century. Here also art, starting from the religious point of view, passed through the allegory and thence only attained the natural form which it required in order to represent its ideas in a truly artistic form. The Moral Play is the allegory of the moral action, which the actual drama has to describe *without* allegory. The moral action, however, at first appears in an allegorical form, because it still wants the body of individuality; art is, as it were, still too weak to express the general idea in a concrete and individual form; it still gives the general substance the form of generality, that is, it represents it allegorically. Because religion stands in the same relation to morality as the general idea to the special phenomenon, as thought to its realisation, as the principle to its fulfilment, the earliest Moralities, therefore, do not treat their subject *only* in its direct relation to Sacred History, but also the moral substance itself, in its most general significance, so that their allegorical figures represent the most general moral conceptions. And as this connection with religion gradually becomes weakened and disappears, so the allegory at the same time continues to become more narrow, more pronounced and definite, and assumes more of a personal individuality. In place of the general representation of the seven deadly sins, which together with the seven cardinal virtues (three religious and four secular) play the chief parts in the earlier pieces, there appear in the later personifications quite distinct moral vices and virtues, such as hypocrisy, intrigue, slander, generosity, magnanimity, etc. The moral themes treated approach ever nearer to the daily life of ordinary men; allusions and references to social conditions, and the political and ecclesiastical relations of the time, occur more and more frequently, the whole tendency of the plays becomes more and more practical, until finally individual characters from common life (an innkeeper, a pedlar, and others) mix with the allegorical figures, the latter only retaining their allegorical significance in name.

By the above remarks we have already indicated in

general outlines the course of the development of the English Moral Plays, from their first appearance at the beginning of the reign of Henry VI. down to the time of Henry VIII. The two oldest Moral Plays to which I have had access, 'The Worlde and the Chylde,' and 'The Moral Play of Every Man,'* are closely related, both in spirit and character, to 'The Castle of Perseverance,' and accordingly still frequently remind one of the Miracle Plays. The piece entitled 'the Worlde and the Chylde,'† treats of the same subject. Chylde is Humanum Genus, man, and the story of his religious and moral life; the play describes how man devotes himself to this world; from the cradle up to the fourteenth year to his physical wants, as a youth to his pleasures and inclinations, as a man, under the sway of the seven deadly sins in living entirely for the world. Although Conscience does indeed lead him to a better path, folly soon entices him from it, and he proceeds further along the road to destruction, till in the end, as an old man, miserable, decrepit, and sick of life, he is again succoured by Perseverance, directed to look to heaven for grace, and is instructed in the twelve articles of faith and the ten commandments; he is finally converted, and concludes the piece with an admonitory address to the audience: this forms the actual substance of the representation. Every character on its first appearance begins by delivering a speech in which it introduces itself, greets the audience and explains its own peculiarities. The dialogue is rather clever in some passages, as for instance between Manhood and Folly—and begins to flag only where the instructing and preaching commences. Yet in both pieces—as in the case of most of the Moral Plays—there is a total absence of genuine action. The language is still very like that of the Mysteries, the versification quite similar but freer, the rhymes are not so skillfully interlaced, the diction rather fluent.

A closer resemblance to the ancient religious plays is found in 'The Moral Play of Every Man,'‡ or, as it is

* The former, printed in 1522, but, according to safe indications, was evidently written before 1506 (Collier, ii. 306 ff.), the latter not printed till 1531, but is probably older still (according to Collier, p. 310, was perhaps written as early as the reign of Edward IV.).

† In Dodsley's Old Plays, xii. 309, 336.

‡ Hawkins, i. 35 ff.

called in the prologue, the 'Sommonynge of Every Man.' Here God Himself, speaking in the second person, begins the representation with an accusation against the human race, which, unmindful of His blessings, His sufferings and death on the cross, thoughtlessly lives on in worldly pleasures, abandoning itself up to the seven deadly sins. God therefore sends Death as a messenger; he is to call Every Man (*Humanum Genus*) to account before His throne; it is in vain that Death is entreated by Every Man to grant him a short time more of life; Death is inexorable. Every Man now tries to procure a companion to accompany him on the dismal road, but all his best friends, trusted comrades, relations, and prosperity forsake him. It is only Good Dedes that would like to go with him, but she is too weak and powerless, for Every Man has almost starved her. She, however, recommends her sister Knowledge. Instructed and consoled by her, Every Man is conducted to the holy man Confession; he here acknowledges his sins, does penance, and is thereupon sent to a priest to receive the holy sacrament. Upon returning he begins to feel weak, and at the last moment he is forsaken even by Beauty, Strength, Dyscrecyon, and Five Witts. It is again only Good Dedes, who has in the meantime become stronger, that accompanies him; with his hand in hers, he meets Death and dies with a prayer on his lips. An angel finally announces that he has been received into the heavenly spheres, and the 'Doctor,' in the epilogue, recapitulates the moral of the piece, in a few words of exhortation.

The play was probably written by a priest; indications of this are found in the occasional introductions of bits of Latin, especially, however, in the long eulogy on the clergy and the power of the Church. The allegory, as we see, is very ingeniously worked out, and the whole piece, both as regards language and character, possesses a certain dignity, an earnestness and an impressiveness, from which it is evident that such dramatic representations must have influenced the moral culture of the people. The versification differs in so far from that of the *Mystery*, as the longer couplets are wanting, and the short lines generally rhyme in twos and twos, occasionally cross-wise. The language also is purer and more refined.

While these two pieces still turn upon the very general idea of good and evil, and still regard it from the religious point of view, *John Skelton's* 'Magnificence; a goodly Interlude,' etc., * is already very specially directed against the evil of extravagance, or rather it is a warning to the lords and the nobility, to observe and not to confound generosity and a free and noble existence with extravagance, recklessness and a licentious life. Magnificence is a prince of high birth and great wealth, who, however, by a confusion of ideas, is led astray by Fancy, Counterfeit Countenance, Crafty Conveyance, and Courtly Abusyon, finds himself thrown into poverty, misery, and despair; but Good Hope, Redresse, Cyrumspeccyon, and Perseverance save him, and he is again restored to his former position. Collier † is of opinion that the piece may have been written as early as the reign of Henry VII. However, from an allusion to the death of Louis XII. of France, which occurs on line 283 f., it cannot have been composed till after 1515, probably soon after the death of Louis. ‡ It is just possible that Skelton wrote the play, not without some special reference to the inclination of his pupil Henry VIII., to lead an extravagant and licentious life. For that it was given on some festive occasion in the king's presence, can scarcely be doubted when we consider Skelton's position as poet laureate. It not only differs internally from the earlier Moralities, by its special conception of the moral, its many allusions to the failings of the age, its more refined culture, wit and humour, but also externally by the essentially different versification. The longer and skilfully interlaced rhyming couplets of the old Mysteries—which were probably the result of the musical way in which they were at one time performed, and which appear to be connected with the poetry of the *Minne-Sänger*—have completely disappeared. The dialogue is generally carried on in lines of from ten to fifteen syllables with rhymes side by side, reminding one forcibly of the Alexandrine; it is only in some of the monologues that we meet with lines in the so-called 'Skeltonian metre,' that is, very short lines of from five to six syllables with

* In the excellent edition of his works by A. Dyce, i. 225-311.

† ii. 325.

‡ Ritson in Dyce, ii. 236.

interlaced rhymes, which Skelton almost invariably used in his lyric poems, and appears to have introduced into English literature. Now, although these long lines, like the Alexandrines themselves, owing to their excessive length, have something heavy about them, still they are far more appropriate for dialogue than the exceedingly undramatic rhyming couplets of the old miracle plays. Hence, this innovation in the linguistic form of the dialogue indicates a progress in the development of the taste for dramatic form, and appears to me to be almost as important as the different stamp of character which Skelton's piece bears in regard to the conception of the subject.

Skelton appears likewise to have been the first to introduce personages from common life among the allegorical figures; this he did in his earlier Moral Play, 'The Nigromansir,' which was printed as early as 1504, but which has been lost. In this case not only is the performance opened by a necromancer, who summons the devil, but there also appears a notary, as the assessor or secretary of the devil, the latter having to decide in the law-suit between Simony and Avarice, upon which the whole piece turns. The path struck by Skelton appears to have been followed further in the Moralities. In one entitled 'The Nature of the Four Elements,' which Collier* analyses, and which, from a passage referring to the discovery of America, must have been written about the year 1517, there appears an inn-keeper, and no longer as a mere dumb personage. The object of the piece is to convince mankind, and especially the English, who are said to waste their time in compiling 'ballads,' and 'other matter not worth a mite,' of the necessity of studying philosophy and the sciences. In this case the moral subject is already treated with perfect freedom, and the allegory appears, so to say, but as a loose and wide garment, which, having half fallen from the shoulder, allows the flesh and blood of actual life to be everywhere recognised.

A further step in advance is made by 'Hick Scorner, a Morality, imprinted by Wynken de Worde,' without date, but no doubt printed soon after 1522.† The piece

* ii., 319 ff.

† Collier ii. 308; reprinted in Hawkins, i. 77-111.

remained long well remembered by the people, for 'Hick Scorner's jests' are mentioned in a publication belonging to the year 1589.* In fact the whole piece seems already to be intended more for amusement and entertainment, than for moral instruction. The moral forms, as it were, but the framework into which the representation is arranged. The play begins, it is true, with a complaint from Mr. Pity about the degraded state of the people; his friends Contemplacyon and Perseverance join in this complaint and pray to God that things may improve, whereupon the three separate. This scene, however, is but a kind of introduction, it is succeeded by the actual body of the play, some interviews between Frewyll, Imaginacyon and Hick Scorner, figures which, without much regard to their allegorical significance, are depicted very much like the dissolute profligates of the licentious times of Henry VIII. They converse jocosely together and laugh at their own pranks, in which Theft and Deceit, but especially Voluptuousness and Gluttony play a great part, in so cynical a manner, that it is clearly evident that the play was intended only for a public of a very mixed description, perhaps for the lower classes. This Interlude ends with a quarrel between Frewyll and Imaginacyon. Pity interferes and tries to conciliate the disputants, but is insulted by all three and put in chains. He is found in this plight by his two friends, who release him, and send him off to look for his tormentors. But Frewyll comes into their way of his own accord. After some speeches on both sides they succeed in converting him, and with his assistance, Imaginacyon also is made to promise that he will improve. This concludes the play: Hick Scorner, although he had given his name to the piece, does not appear again. It is only on account of the commencement and the conclusion of the play, that it can be called 'a Morality.' It is interesting, not merely owing to the prevailing popular tone, but precisely on account of the gradual disappearance of the moral tendency, with which consequently the allegory is likewise withdrawn. Hick Scorner, as the name in fact shows, can scarcely be regarded as an allegorical figure; he is an individual character who

* Said to be by Nash.

appears chiefly in his prevailing love for slander and scorns. Frewyll and Imaginacyon are as like him as two peas. But even in the case of Pity, Perseverance, and Contemplacyon, the allegory is only, as it were, the firm under which these personages act; they are in reality actual human beings, who, again, are characterised principally in regard to these virtues. For this very reason it does not seem to me likely that the play, as Collier thinks, was written in the reign of Henry VII., I should be inclined to place it in that of Henry VIII. This supposition is supported not only by a few very severe attacks upon the sinful, licentious life of the priests, but also by diction and versification, especially by those long lines, like the Alexandrines, which decidedly predominate, and which in a play of the thirteenth century would be unparalleled.

CHAPTER III.

JOHN HEYWOOD'S INTERLUDES.

HICK SCORNER, in my opinion, must be regarded as the point of transition from the Moralities to Heywood's Interludes, which again mark an important historical stage in the development of the English drama. The reign of Henry VIII. is the beginning of a new period as regards England. Without entering upon a closer examination of this period, I shall merely mention some events which directly influenced the further development of dramatic art. Among these were, I think, first of all, King Henry's luxury, love of splendour and pleasure: he ruled like a despot, made an external show of the whole might, majesty and power of the state, which was centred in his own person; and then that peculiar excitement of the nation which, being politically oppressed, began (in consequence of the Reformation) to move more freely and independently in the clerico-religious direction, and by its lively interest in the great ecclesiastical questions of the day, took an important part in public life.

The king's extravagant love of show and amusement in the first place increased dramatic art both as regards the external means of its subsistence and also as regards the greater value and esteem which were conferred upon it. The example of the Duke of Gloucester (afterwards Richard III.) to keep a private company of actors, had already become a fashion among the English nobles. A certain number of actors were engaged and formed part of the lord's men or retainers, wore his crest and livery, and had a claim to his protection, but were otherwise specially paid for every performance (twenty shillings by an earl, ten by a baron), a relation which continued down to Shakspeare's time. Even under Henry VII. we hear of the special theatrical companies in the service of the Dukes of Norfolk and Buckingham, and of Earls Arundel, Oxford, and

Northumberland, who gave representations at Court on various occasions. At the same time we meet with companies of actors belonging to the respective towns of York, Coventry, Lavenham, Chester, Kingston, and others, who, probably, as the annual Miracle Plays still continued to be given by the members of the trading companies, generally played Moralities and Interludes. Henry VII. himself kept two companies of players, each of which, however, as was usually the case, consisted but of four or five members (hence the frequent direction of the author on the ancient prints of Moral Plays and Interludes, as to how the different parts were to be divided among the players, which, and how many each one had to play). However, the luxurious Henry VIII., whose meeting with Francis I.* cost 3000*l.* for dresses and maskers alone, was not satisfied with so limited a number of players. He not only ordered the gentlemen of the choir and the singing boys of the Royal Chapel, as well as those of the clerical singing schools of Westminster, St. Paul's, and Windsor, to become stage players, but in 1514 engaged a third company of actors for the service of the Court. The cost for theatrical entertainments, for masques, disguisings, and revels of all kinds, amounted to something enormous, according to the ideas of the time. Henry, for instance, raised the sum, which up to that time had been paid for a "play," from £6 13*s.* 4*d.* to £10. William Cornishe, the choir-master of the chapel boys, received on one single occasion 200*l.* as a remuneration, and John Heywood (as a Court "singer") received an annual salary of 20*l.*, in addition to his other extraordinary emoluments. Besides this the Lord of Misrule (the master of all sports and revels at Court) was specially paid, with equal liberality.

The persons about Court naturally followed the king's example, and the number of the companies of players in the service of some individual lords became exceedingly numerous. Even monasteries and abbeys encouraged and fostered dramatic art, and occasionally, as it seems, with the assistance of the clergy themselves, had representations given by companies of players within the abbey walls; this was done, for instance, in the Priory of Dunmow, for

* Mentioned by Shakspeare, Act I. Sc. I.

in the account-books of that place from 1532-36, we find noted down thirty-six different sums as paid to the king's players, as also to those in the service of Earls Derby, Exeter, and Sussex.

This rise and increase of the external appurtenances was naturally followed by the extension, decoration, and variety of the subject. The play had received its appointed position in the class of revels, and the more that entertainment and pleasure was demanded of it, the more accordingly rose the value of the *comic* element; the spectators wished to be amused, wished to laugh; comic scenes therefore were wanted. The comic element, in the first stages of its development in all cases, naturally moves at first within the lower strata of human society; it appears at first rough and outspoken even to rudeness, and the grotesque is its favourite garb. Hence coarse comic scenes from common popular life form the subject in which it most delights to express itself. In addition to this it must be remembered that, as already remarked, the life of the people at this time was acquiring a greater importance, an inner restlessness and animation, and demanded consideration on the part of princes and the nobility. Lastly, it lay in the general character of the more recent times not only to oppose a more practical, worldly, and realistic tendency to the idealism of the Middle Ages, but also to question the prevailing ideas, the ruling powers, and the transmitted institutions, as to their justification and validity,—a tendency which at first always appears in the form of the comic, in the garb of parody and satire, because they and the comic, in their nature, are one and the same thing. For the comic, of course, is the very natural opposite of every exaggerated sublimation of the mind, the sworn enemy of fantastic ideals, as of all thoughts and opinions, that are opposed to actual life; it is the contemplation of actual conditions and relations in the light of this contrast. But the character of the more recent times possessed the principle of individuality, the right of asserting the living personality against the decaying institutions of the Middle Ages, against the feudal state and hierarchy, as indeed against the tyrannical system of corporations which had become

mechanical, and in which the individual living man was only employed as the lifeless part of a machine. Henry VIII. was a monarch who stood as man and king at the extreme point of this contrast; following entirely his own caprices and personal desires, he spared neither the traditional claims of the Church nor the rightful and political institutions of the State—neither arbitrary assumptions nor well-founded rights. This opposition to the spirit of the Middle Ages appears at first under the protecting veil of the comic.

All these endeavours, desires, and requirements, could not be satisfied either by the ancient Miracle Plays, with their limited and ever-repeated subjects, nor by the Moralities with their stiff seriousness, their cold allegory and their diffuse and abstract generalities. It required a new form, a new kind of conception and treatment of the dramatic material. This presented itself in John Heywood's 'Interludes,' a species of dramatic play, to which, as Collier thinks, the title of 'Interludes' most properly belongs, were it only to distinguish them from the Moralities in the narrower sense of the word.

John Heywood was born in London, and was not without higher culture, having studied at Oxford, but he was more witty than learned; he was acquainted with many distinguished men of his day, such as Sir Thomas More and others, was a favourite of Henry VIII., and still more so of Mary, the Catholic. He began to write for the stage (as Collier has proved) about 1520, when 'Player on the Virginals,' at the court of King Henry, although his earliest piece, the 'Play between the Pardoner and the Friar,' etc., must necessarily have been written before the death of Leo X. (1521). This piece found great favour with both high and low. Heywood is also noted for his witty epigrams, of which he wrote hundreds, and appears in fact to have stood in high estimation as an author and wit. Nevertheless after the death of Queen Mary he left his native country, owing to religious considerations (he was a zealous Catholic), and repaired to Malines, where he died in 1565.* He must not be confounded with his son

* See Chalmers, in the already mentioned edition of *Dodsley's O. Plays*, xii. 45 ff. Also Collier, ii. 385.

Jaspar Heywood, who, after 1559, published several portions of Seneca in an English translation, together with some poems, nor with the later Thomas Heywood, the favourite popular dramatist of Shakspeare's time.

Heywood's plays, although the way was paved for them by some of the Moralities, such as 'Hick Scorner' and others, and in so far may be regarded again but as a variety of Moral Plays, nevertheless at once struck a perfectly new chord by completely and suddenly throwing aside the allegorical form, the religious and moral tendency, and placing themselves in the centre of common life. They betray a close affinity to the carnival plays of Hans Sachs, for instance with the *Narrenschneiden*, a single scene between an itinerant doctor, his servant, and an invalid. Hence it may be that Heywood received his first impulse from the carnival plays which were so popular in Germany in the fifteenth century—and the chief seat of which was Nürnberg, with its Folz and Rosenpluth—even though he may have known them only by report. It is, however, also possible that Heywood's Interludes originated under French influence; for in France—as some extant pieces prove—we meet, as early as the thirteenth century, with dramatic plays of only a single scene, generally representing disputes, 'querelles,' between two or three persons, which were performed by minstrels for the amusement of the aristocracy on festive days;* they were a species of dramatic joke, often probably merely improvised jokes, which no doubt the German jugglers and ballad-singers, at an early date, were in the habit of practising, and which in the course of time gave rise to the Carnival plays. However we can as little historically prove a foreign influence in this case as in that of the Moralities, which likewise appear earlier in France than in England, and are spoken of in the above-mentioned patent of Charles VI., in 1402, among the 'comédies pieuses' together with the Mysteries.

Nevertheless, the great resemblance of Heywood's dramatic productions with those scenes where the minstrels dispute, as well as with the German Carnival plays—the

* *Le Grand d'Aussi: Fabliaux, ou Contes, Fables et Romans du XII^{me} et XIII^{me} siècle.* Paris, 1829, ii. 201 f. Monmerqué et Michel, l.c. 208 ff.

favourite theme of which is of course likewise quarrels in the market and legal disputes—remains a striking one. Thus, one of his Interludes is merely a discourse between John, James, and Jerome, about the disputed question as to whether a fool or a wise man is the happier. Of this species of play, only this one specimen has been preserved in manuscript; * but even the rest of his pieces consist of only one or a few separate scenes of a similar character, and acquire a more dramatic appearance merely from the fact that they generally pourtray the persons represented in a sharp and striking manner, sometimes also by the intermezzo of a fight, which gives the short play some action as well. (The already mentioned 'Mery Play between the Pardoner and the Frere, the Curate and Neybour Pratte' (printed at London, etc. 1533), † turns upon a double quarrel; in the first place between a Mendicant Friar and a seller of indulgences, into whose hands the curate has placed the disposal of a church, to the friar for delivering his sermons, to the other for exhibiting his relics, hence—as is expressly indicated—to both, in reality, for abuse of extortion. The Friar and the Pardoner both appear simultaneously, commence their harangues, but soon leave off the competition with their lungs, and take to their fists; thereupon ensues a dispute between these two and the Curate, who, attracted by the noise, tries to separate the combatants, and, as he is unable to do this, calls neighbour Pratte to his assistance. The latter seizes the Pardoner, the Curate the mendicant Friar; however, the disturbers of the peace are too strong for them, and in place of their being able to stop the fight, as they intended, Pratte and the Curate, after a thorough thrashing, are glad to settle the affair peaceably, by allowing their opponents to make a free retreat. This concludes the play. The point of the whole piece lies in its satirical tendency against the mischief made by the sellers of indulgences and the Mendicant Friars, under the pretext of religion and the protection of the Church; the frauds, wiles, and devices by which they endeavoured to attain

* An analysis and some passages from the play are given by Collier, *l.c.*, ii. 393 f.

† Collier, *ii.* 386 f.

their ends—money and again money—are openly exhibited and sharply lashed by the reproaches which their representatives throw at each other.

Similar in character and tendency is 'The play called the Four PP.: a new and very merry Interlude of a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Potycary, and a Pedler; made by John Heywood, Impr. at Lond., &c.,'* except that it is devoid of all action.† The piece is a mere dialogue between the four persons mentioned on the title page. It commences with a dispute between the Palmer (that is, a pilgrim by profession, who lives by wandering from one holy place to another, a species of men not unfrequently met with in those days), and a Pardoner, or seller of indulgences, about the question as to whether it were better to make perpetual pilgrimages in foreign lands, or to stay at home and attain eternal blessedness by selling indulgences. This controversy, at the same time, forms the red thread which always reappears after the discussion has broached all kinds of questions. Finally, the Pardoner gives utterance to the decisive words, that every road, every virtue, in its own way, leads to heaven. To judge from the compass and the character of the play, however, the dramatic centre of the whole is formed by a competition in lying, proposed by the Pardoner, although it is introduced merely as an intermezzo. The Apothecary and the Pardoner relate the most marvellous and incredible stories, each from their own sphere of life. The Palmer, however, carries off the victory by the simple assertion—which is, so to say, merely thrown in for the occasion—that of the five hundred thousand women with whom he became acquainted on his pilgrimages, he had not met one that was not gentle and patient. This, exclaim the two others involuntarily, is the most monstrous falsehood they had ever heard. Puns, comic turns, pertinent comparisons and allusions, enliven the talk; there is, upon the whole, such a redundancy of wit, that it is not sur-

* Reprinted in Dodsley's latest edition, i. 53-103.

† The play possesses an unmistakable likeness to No. 9 in the collection of the German Carnival Plays: *Deutsche Fastnachts-Spiele aus dem 15ten Jahrhundert*. A publication of the Literary Society of Stuttgart, 1853.

prising that this new species of dramatic play supplanted the earlier style of Moral Plays which were often very dry and tedious. There is of course no dearth of satirical attacks on women and the pitiful medical knowledge of the day, nor of attacks on the mischief of pilgrimages and the selling of indulgences. Herein again lies the point of the whole representation. The dialogue is carried on in an excellent manner, the diction is animated, clever and flowing, consisting of short lines in rhyming couplets, which again have a strong resemblance to the lines of the German carnival plays.

The greatest amount of action in the three extant Interludes of Heywood, occurs in 'the Mery Play between Johan the husbände, Tyb his wife, and Sir Jhan the priest,' printed in 1533.* Yet here also the whole action is centred in the preparation of a supper, in fetching water and mending a broken pitcher, which John, the hen-pecked husband, has been ordered to do, by his wife—and lastly, again, in a fight between John and his wife, and her paramour the priest, in which John, of course, comes off worst; but when his two opponents quit the stage after having 'made the blood ronne about his erys,' John consoles himself with the thought that it was he who put them to flight. This finishes the play. Thus the action in this case again is devoid of an independent character, the conversations are the main things.†

In spite of this great defect, Heywood's Interludes nevertheless indicate a decided progress in dramatic art.

* Collier, ii. 389 f.

† It is much the same with the *Play of the Wether*; a new and very mery interlude of all maner of wether, (printed in 1533; Collier, ii. 391 f.) in which Jupiter is not only attacked by Phoebus, Saturn, Æolus and Phoebe, with complaints and wishes about the weather, but likewise by all kinds of mortals, a gentleman, a merchant, the owner of a water and of a windmill, and others, every one wishing something different. Finally, however, Jupiter decides that their contradictory wishes shall be satisfied one after the other, in the change of the seasons. The allegorical figures bring the piece into a closer relation with the later and freer character of the Moral Plays; besides giving amusement, its aim is also to give instruction in physical science. Otherwise the style and character are the same as in the case of the fourth Interlude already discussed. These five plays are all that have been preserved of Heywood's dramatic compositions.

In contrast to the Mysteries and Moral Plays which represent the General only from one point of view in the form of generality—whether by historical characters of symbolic significance, which had become typical, or by allegorical figures—there appears in Heywood's plays the other pole of all art, the Individual and the Personal. As opposed to the prevailing power of the ideal—whether the religious ideal of a pious, God-fearing life (such as is portrayed in the Bible histories), or the moral of a general power of ethical forces—Heywood's pieces describe the naturalness of common actual life in its naked directness. In them the prevailing tendency to religious instruction and moral improvement gives way to the endeavour to afford amusement and recreation by the scenes represented. At first in sharp opposition and exclusiveness, Heywood repeatedly declares that his only intention is to make sport, 'to passe the time without offence.' His plays are representations of particular events and personages to the *exclusion* of all general relations; they are descriptions from nature to the *exclusion* of all ideality; faithful reflections of certain traits of the physiognomy of his time, entirely without embellishment. Thus he and his successors represent, as it were, the Dutch school of painting, with their portraits and their so-called naturalism, the encouragement of which likewise gave a new and onward impulse to the study of nature in Italy. 'It is the form-giving, thought-embodying principle of *individuality* and *truth to nature*, which in Heywood's dramas takes that one-sided form of distinctness, through which all art has to pass before it can find the ideal form for the ideal thought.

Heywood seems at once to have brought the new species of drama—which to a certain extent may be called his own invention—to the highest perfection of which it was capable. His successors, as far as we can judge from the few extant remains of this species of play, surpass him only in one or the other respect, and are generally inferior to him. For instance, the 'Dialogue—of gentylnes and nobylte,' the author of which probably was the printer and bookseller Rastell (in the reign of Henry VIII.), was much too diffuse, stiff, and tedious. Another similar production, called 'John Bon and Mast. Parson; Impr. at Lon-

don by John Day and Willyam Seres*—a discourse between a ploughman and a Catholic priest upon the significance of mass and the feast of Corpus Christi, in which John Bon, by his questions, objections and counter-remarks, especially attacks the doctrine of transubstantiation, and in the end drives the priest off the field—is, on the other hand, almost too short, in any case is devoid of all drastic animation, and written in too serious and dry a tone.† ‘The new Enterlude, called Theresytes,’ written in 1537, is indeed distinguished by a certain striving towards a more finished style, and a greater variety of subject-matter; the action also, by possessing a more independent significance, comes more into the foreground, but it scarcely equals Heywood’s Interludes in spirit and humour, or in the cleverness of his dialogue. Hence, the only play of interest as regards the progress in the development of the English drama, is one published between 1530 and 1540, called on the title-page a comedy ‘in maner of an enterlude,’ which describes ‘the beauty and good properties of women as well as their vices and evil conditions.’‡ In this case an attempt is made to work out the *serious* subject with a moral tendency in the style of Heywood’s Interludes. At the same time it is the first play of this species that contains a kind of plot, a connected and progressive, although a very short and simple, action; the play turns upon the rejected love of young Calisto for Melibea, and upon the manner in which, with the assistance of a bawd, he received the girdle of his beloved—the symbol of her chastity—from her own hands in a moment of sympathy and thoughtlessness, and concludes by the audience receiving a moral exhortation from old Danio, the father of the heroine.

* It has no date, and was reprinted in the form of the original by Smeeton, Printer, 148, St. Martin’s Lane, also without a date. This piece was most kindly lent to me by Th. O. Weigel, from his valuable collection of works belonging to English literature.

† According to the concluding words of the priest—in which he remarks that many are now returning to the old way, and where in earlier times the mass was hated and despised, ‘messe in Latin’ are again introduced—the pamphlet, which had probably never been performed (and indeed was probably never intended to be acted), must have been written in the reign of Edward VI., or in that of Mary the Catholic.

‡ Collier, ii. 408 ff.

From this last example it is evident that the Interludes, written in Heywood's style, aimed at giving these popular scenes from real life, more action and a deeper and more significant character. This was a right instinct. The great object now was to combine the elements of the drama which already existed, but were still separated and, as it were, torn asunder, into one organic whole; to blend the idealism of the Mysteries and Moralities, and the general form in which they represented the subject, with the principle of individuality and of living, natural reality, which was what Heywood had comprehended, and had carried out in a one-sided way; also, to exhibit the ideal character of the general religious and moral conception of life and the world, in the life and actions of individual, actual men; and lastly to do justice to the personal character and to the freedom of will in the individual, without giving up the idea of a divine government of the universe (such as was represented in the Mysteries), and the principle of a higher moral necessity founded upon the influence of general moral forces, such as was exhibited in the Moralities. In short, if the representation of a complete historical, and, therefore, truly dramatic action was to be attained, then the action—which in Heywood's Interludes appeared as the free but accidental and insignificant action of the individual, in the Mysteries as a supernatural and divine fact, and in the Moralities as the result of general moral conditions and of the moral necessity working in them—would have to combine within itself all these elements, and to represent them as the result of their reciprocal interaction.

CHAPTER IV.

THE POINTS OF TRANSITION TO THE REGULAR DRAMA.

EVERY one of the above three forms of the English drama accordingly, starting with its own principle and from its own ground, endeavoured to appropriate the other two elements. While the Interludes strove to attain this in the manner described, some new Miracle Plays, or at least plays written in their style after the time of Henry VIII., no longer kept as strictly to Biblical subjects, but treated these more freely, and entered the domain of history by all kinds of allusions and deviations. The first impulse to this was the great interest which the ecclesiastical movements of the time excited in all minds. Thus, for instance, the four extant religious dramas of *John Bale*, (Doctor of theology and Vicar of Thorndon in Suffolk), which he had printed abroad in 1538—and to which he adds the name of ‘interlude,’ although they are partly tragedies, partly comedies, and are directly connected with the ancient Miracle plays, both as regards style and character—are evidently written with the intention of promoting the Reformation and of attacking the abuses of the Catholic Church. His ‘Tragedy or Enterlude,’ under the title of ‘God’s Promises,’* shows in a series of scenes, how the foundations of man’s life, from the fall of Adam down to the birth of Christ, did not consist in man’s own virtues and righteousness, but in God’s promises, God’s forbearance and grace; an epilogue, spoken by the poet himself, expressly defends the doctrine of justification by faith and attacks the Catholic doctrine of justification by works.† His ‘Comedy, Christ’s Tem-

* Printed in Dodsley’s Collection, i. 9–42; and in Marriott, p. 223 ff.

† This piece is otherwise very undramatic. Every one of the seven acts consists of a discourse between God and one of the principal characters of the Old Testament, the first with Adam, the second with Noah, and then in succession with Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and

tation,' on the other hand, is full of attacks on the papacy, on fastings, the withdrawal of the Bible, and other abuses in the Catholic Church.* It may be assumed that the rest of his dramatic productions also, of which a great many have been lost, were of the same character. This tendency seems also by degrees to have affected the old popular pageants. At all events in 1561, the Scottish people, in celebrating Queen Mary's arrival, gave religious plays, in which they represented the awful judgment of the Almighty against idolatry, in the downfall of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram. Lord Randolph, the English ambassador at the Scottish court at the time, calls these plays 'pageants' in his report, and gives one to understand that they proceeded from hatred against the Catholic form of worship, and that, in reality, they were throughout an attack on the same.† Also, in 'the Pretie new Enterlude, both pithie and pleasant, of the story of King Daryus, beinge taken out of the third and fourth chapter of the third booke of Esdras'‡ there are some strong invectives against the papacy.

The last play at the same time indicates the other path pursued by the religious drama in order to arrive on the actual ground of human actions and sufferings, having started from Sacred History and the divine actions there depicted. Writers of plays kept more to the Old Testament, and more especially worked out those stories in which the divine guidance of earthly affairs was not so prominent. Thus, for instance, the above mentioned 'King Daryus' dramatises a single historical feature reported in the third book of Ezra, and in 'the Historie of Jacob and Esau, taken from the twenty-seventh chapter of the first booke of Moses' (which was printed in 1568, but was very likely written ten years previously), there is no divine interference

John the Baptist. The subject is always the same: God's wrath at the perpetual recurrence of the dominion of sin in Israel, the prayers of God-fearing men for the sinful people, and God's gracious promises. Every act ends with the chanting of a religious *antiphonia*, to which an English translation is added. The diction is indeed more dignified and more refined, but devoid of animation.

* Collier, ii. 239 ff.

† See Raumer: *Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte*, etc., i. 13.

‡ Collier, p. 245 f.

with events, no admixture of symbolical and allegorical figures; the piece moves purely in the natural world of man and of historical reality.* It is probable also that even Ralph Radcliffe's lost dramas—which he began to compose in the year 1538, and had performed, probably by his pupils at Hitchen in the refectory of an abolished Carmelite monastery, and most of which were likewise founded on subjects from the Old Testament (Job's Sufferings, the Burning of Sodom, etc.)—were worked out in a similar style. The object was to combine the Miracle Play and the Morality by furnishing the historical subject from the Old Testament with allegorical figures, as in the case of Moralities, partly in order to give the particular story a more general moral significance, partly in order that, by introducing 'Vice' with his jokes and pranks, the subject might be enlivened. Thus in the above mentioned 'King Daryus,' there are represented, in addition to Vice (who acts under the name of Iniquity), the allegorical figures of Constancy, Equity, Charity, etc. And in another piece, printed in 1561, which treats of the story of the Queen Esther, we find, in addition to some characters that are free inventions of the author, not only the allegorical figures of Pride, Adulation, and Ambition, but Vice appears as the actual clown, or, rather, in place of Vice, we have a jester under the name of Hardy Dardy, whose coat even, as it seems, marks him the fool by profession; he carries on his jokes quite freely and frankly, without any allegorical disguise.†

A similar mixture of Miracle Play, Morality and History is, in my opinion, to be found also in that remarkable but unfortunately lost play, which was performed at Greenwich as early as 1528 in the presence of Henry VIII., Cardinal Wolsey, the French ambassador, and other great lords. It was written in Latin by John Rightwise, Master of St. Paul's School, and its object evidently was to represent the Reformation as a work of lies, of unbelief and of sedition. In this play there appeared: Luther as a monk, and Catherine von Bora in a dress of red silk, such as was then worn by the women of Spire; Religio, Ecclesia, and Veritas; the apostles Peter, Paul, and James; an

* Collier, *l.c.*, p. 247 ff.

† Collier, *ii.* 253 ff.

orator and a poet, a cardinal, the dauphin of France and his brother; Lady Peace, Lady Quietness, Lady Tranquillity, and others.* Even though in some cases a historical thread had at an earlier date been interwoven with the subject, as for instance in the play written as early as the time of Henry VII., and again performed in Chester in 1529, the subject of which was the history of King Robert of Sicily—showing how, on account of his blasphemous pride and arrogance, he was robbed of his throne by an angel in the night, and made to act as the angel's jester, the angel meanwhile playing the part of king, and how, after various humiliations, he is brought to repentance and contrition, and again restored to his dignity†—still in the present case the historical matter is conceived and treated quite in the manner of a legend. If, on the other hand, as in the case of the above-mentioned example, very recent occurrences were brought upon the stage, it may be assumed that the plays kept somewhat more closely to the historical facts, although doubtless the historical fact itself was never so prominent in its allegorical disguise, as the author's opinion of it, the impression made by it on contemporaries, and the thoughts and reflections engendered by it. Much was, however, already gained, if only some place in the drama was secured for historical matter.

This was evidently the aim of the later Moral Plays. They at first followed a path similar to that pursued by the above-mentioned religious dramas, that is, by making allusions to and digressions on the great struggle for and against the Reformation. Thus, for instance, the *Enterlude*, called '*Lusty Juventus*, lyvely describing the fraylty of Youth,' etc.,‡ probably written by a certain R. Wever whose name stands at the end of the old print, in the reign of Edward VI., was in reality a dramatised sermon on conversion. *Lusty Juventus* is twice brought back to the right way by Good Counsell and Knowledge of God's Veritie—through words from Holy Writ, and by the

* Collier, i. 106 f.; also his *Shakespeare*, i. p. xxxii.

† Collier, i. 113 ff.

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† Collier, i. 113 ff.

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exposition of the Protestant doctrine of faith. Violent attacks on the papacy, on the worship of saints and relics, and on the justification by works in the Catholic Church, to some extent season the dry and heavy sermonising tone of the dialogue. Similar in character and tendency, but more detailed and more dramatically animated is 'Newe Custome, a new Enterlude no less wittie than pleasant,' etc.,* which must have been written at the time of Elizabeth's accession to the throne. Newe Custome, or Primitive Constitution, as he calls himself in the course of the representation, is the Reformation, who, in league with the Light of the Gospels, wages war against Perverse Doctrine, that is, against the Catholic Church—corrupted by all kinds of human inventions, such as masses, purgatory, papacy, and indulgencies—and its confederates Ignorance and Hypocrisy. This allegorically-described conflict forms the centre of the action, till Perverse Doctrine is converted, abjures his sins and errors, and associates himself with Edification, Assurance, and God's Felicity. A prayer for the nation and the Queen concludes the piece. The play is remarkable not only because it is already divided into scenes and (three) acts, but especially on account of the versification.

The history of the English drama, as must have been evident from the preceding account, is distinguished by the regularity and the natural course of its development, in which every higher stage rests upon the preceding one; and all the points of transition, both internally and externally, not only occur most regularly, but can be distinctly demonstrated by existing examples. The regularity extends even to the versification. The skillfully interlaced rhyming couplets of the old Mysteries—which consist of many strophes of short lines—were, as we have seen, changed by the Moralities at the time of their highest perfection, generally into verses with lines rhyming in twos and twos, rarely into verses with alternate rhymes. Accordingly, in Skelton's 'Magnyficence,' and in 'Hick Scornor,' there occur those longer lines—far more appropriate for dialogue and hence far more dramatic in character—in which we already noticed an inclination to

* Printed in 1573; reprinted in Dodsley, *l.c.*, i. 267–308.

the Alexandrines. This tendency continued to be followed, and in the above plays we already have the genuine Alexandrines, the cæsura in the middle; the rhymes are close together without cross-rhymes or interlacings, but more freely sustained, frequently with several syllables too long, rarely too short. Thus the lines already somewhat resemble those rhymed lines which are even met with in Shakspeare's earlier plays,* except that in Shakspeare we of course find them more artistically constructed.

The endeavour to assist the Reformation by means of the drama was of course opposed by attempts made by the Catholic party, with an entirely different intention. The 'Interlude of Youth' † is more in the style of the earlier Moralities, and as regards plan and character has a good deal of resemblance to the 'Moral Play of Every Man.' It is, however, richer in wit and dramatic life, and proves its later origin by various attacks on the Reformation, and by speeches in defence and in favour of Catholicism.‡ Of more interest because, in attacking its object with greater determination, it touches upon the history of the day, is a play composed about the same time (1553), and likewise by an unknown author.§ It bears the title of 'Respublica;' the poet in the prologue, however, expressly intimates that by the name of Respublica we are to understand England, by Nemesis, one of the principal characters, Queen Mary, by People, the English nation, and by Suppression, the Reformation. Among the followers of the latter are Avarice, Insolence, and Adulation; they are opposed by Justice, Peace, Truth, and Mercy. The whole turns upon the complaints of People and of Respublica about the Reformation, which is finally punished and suppressed by Nemesis. In this case the Morality has already resolved itself into allegorical history, and the allegory now appears only in the form of the perfectly transparent, and hence superfluous disguise of the tendencies of the time.

While these and similar Moral Plays are gradually

* *Love's Labour Lost*, and others.

† Imprinted at London by John Walsey, s.a., but which must necessarily have been written between 1547 and 1558.

‡ Collier, ii. 313 ff.

§ Collier gives an analysis of the piece in his edition of Shakspeare's Works, v. i., p. xviii. f.

transforming the original subject-matter of Moralities, and are striving to extend the boundaries of their domain, others pursued the path struck out by 'Hick Scorner,' that is, they endeavoured to enliven the subject by introducing individual characters and comic scenes from common life, and sought to approach nearer to actual comedy. The best example of this kind is furnished by the recent reprint of a play first published in 1579, but probably written in 1560; it is entitled the 'Contract of a Marriage between Wit and Wisdome,' etc.* In this case, even more so than in 'Hick Scorner,' the Morality appears like an external disguise of the subject, chiefly because it no longer adheres to actual moral ideas, but rambles into the province of psychology. Idleness, taking the place of Vice, plays in fact the principal part, but is here only by name an allegorical figure; he is in reality the honest English clown, the fool by profession, whose business is to make fun and nothing but fun. Idleness, in alliance with Wantonness, a courtesan, Miss Fancy, an intriguing wench, and Irksomeness, a peevish bully, endeavour to prevent the marriage between young Master Wit and Dame Wisdom, which was recommended to the former by his parents Severity and Indulgence. They succeed at first, but Good Nature releases Wit from their snares, and after the latter in a duel has overcome Irksomeness, the marriage is at length actually celebrated. This is the substance of the moral and allegorical action. It is, however, cast into the shade by those parts where Idleness, as clown, surrounded by all kinds of individual figures from popular life, is the centre of attraction. Thus, in the very first act (the play is divided into ten scenes and these again into two acts) the longest scene turns upon an intermezzo between Idleness and two thieves, Snatch and Catch; the former disguised as a foreign doctor with a purse in his pocket, stolen from Wit; Snatch, on his part is robbed of it by Catch, and is bantered in the most amusing manner. The second act begins with a similar scene between Idleness and Search, the constable, who has been sent to arrest Idleness; the latter, who has meanwhile changed into a

* Published for the Shakespeare Society by J. O. Halliwell, London, 1846.

rat-catcher, answers the constable's questions, by telling him that he does indeed know the rascal whom he (the constable) is seeking, but does not know where he is to be found. Whereupon Search asks Idleness to call out his own warrant in the streets, which he does in the most ludicrous manner, by constantly misrepresenting the constable's words. After a short interview between Wit and Fancy, Idleness again puts in an appearance, and makes off with a soup bowl, one of the household treasures of Mother Bee. Doll, the maid, and Lob, the man servant, rush in and lament over the loss, till Mother Bee herself appears, and, exceedingly enraged at their negligence, belabours both; finally Inquisition brings in the thief with the bowl. The scenes which, as is evident, stand in no sort of connection with the actual subject, are excellent of their kind, and with them the play forms the best point of transition to those comedies—consisting of exactly similar scenes—like ‘Gammer Gurton’s Needle,’ in which the moral-allegorical element has already entirely disappeared, and which seem to have come into existence much about the same time as the Moral Plays. The diction in the latter is flowing and animated, it is only in some passages that it is very corrupt; the dialogue in the scenes from common life are excellent; in the versification the Alexandrine is unmistakable, it is only in the comic parts—perhaps to increase the ludicrous effect—that it is drawn out to a ridiculous length.

Directly connected with these and similar pieces, where the Moral plays seem in a similar manner to be combined with Heywood’s Interludes—much in the same way as, in the above-mentioned examples, the Miracle Play is combined with the Morality—are those dramas in which the relation is the reverse, and in which the actual subject consists of an action from real life or history, in which, however, allegorical figures still play a part. The oldest example of this kind is a work by the same John Bale, of whom we have already noticed some pieces in the style of Miracle Plays; it bears the title of ‘Kynge Johan,’ and was first performed in the reign of Elizabeth, but no doubt written as early as in that of Edward VI. For it has obviously the tendency to promote the Reformation in

England and to warn persons against the papacy, by making direct comparisons of the events of the reign of King John—especially the arrogance of the Pope, the sentence of excommunication which he passed upon the whole kingdom, the murder of the king at the instigation of the priests, etc.—with the conditions of England under Edward. The allegorical figures are introduced only to throw a clearer light upon this relation of the great difference between the times, and hence also upon the author's intentions, by endeavouring to give the individual events a more general significance.* It is in a similar style that *Nathaniel Wood* in his 'Excellent new Commedie, Intituled: The Conflict of Conscience,'† treats the story of the Italian lawyer Francis Spiera. The prologue expressly intimates that the figure of Philologus is meant to represent Francis Spiera, and the principal events of his life—his embracing the cause of the Reformation, the lawsuit which is in consequence brought against him (in this case by the allegorical figures of Tyranny, Hypocrisy, and Avarice), his summons before the 'Cardinal,' his defence, his return to papacy (in this case the work of Sensual Suggestion represented in consequence of the threat of prison and torture), finally his repentance of it, and his suicide—form the subject-matter of the play.

One step further in this direction was made by *Thomas Preston's* 'Lamentable Tragedy mixed ful of pleasant mirth, conteyning the Life of Cambyses, King of Persia,' etc.,‡ which was probably composed in 1561. The author was a man of education and had studied at Cambridge. His work, however, is a rather crude and bungling performance: Cambyses at the beginning declares his intention of marching into Egypt, and appoints Judge Sisamnes as Regent. The latter abuses his power, and on the accusation of Common Complaint, supported by Proof and Trial, the king, who has meanwhile returned, orders him to be put to death. After this Cambyses commits all possible

* The piece exists among the publications of the Camden Society, for which society it has been re-published by Collier.

† Printed in 1581, but no doubt written at least twenty years earlier, Collier, ii. 358 ff.

‡ Imprinted at London s.a. Reprinted in Hawkins, i. 251-319.

kinds of villainous deeds one after the other, kills the son of his counsellor, because the latter reproaches him with being addicted to drink, causes his own brother Smirdis to be murdered, because he is said to have wished the king dead, gives his step-daughter in marriage against her will—she is already married—and causes her to be put to death, because she reproaches him with having murdered his brother, and finally appears with his own sword run through his body (it has pierced him while he was mounting his horse) in order to die a miserable death. Between these are inserted comic scenes, in which three brawlers, a courtesan, and a few peasants and the wife of one of these, headed by Vice under the name of Ambidexter, exhibit their coarse humour—scenes which do not only stand in no sort of connection with the main action, but which, instead of bringing it to a point, usually end in a general row. The piece is remarkable only because the allegory is in so far repressed that it is now represented only by Vice—more in the nature of a double-tongued servant than like the Vice of the old Moralities—and by all kinds of general names given to persons who have no individual character because they represent the common people, or servants and subordinate personages. Thus in place of the citizens oppressed by Sisamnes there appear Common's Cry, and Common's Complaint, in place of the legal proceedings Proof and Trial, in place of the two assassins Cruelty and Murder, in place of a poor citizen Small Abilitie, and in place of the hangman Execution. The moral of the whole lies in the rules which a good king has to observe in order to live in conformity with his dignity, and is explained in the prologue. The epilogue concludes in the customary manner with good wishes "for our noble Queen."

Akin to the above in style and character is 'The New Tragicall Comedie of Appius and Virginia, etc., by R. B. Imprinted at London in 1575.*' It has not yet been ascertained who the author, R. B., is; the play, however, was written very much about the same time as Preston's 'Cambyeses,' that is, in the first years of Elizabeth's reign.†

* Reprinted in Dodsley, *l.c.*, xii. 431 ff.

† See note in Dodsley, *l.c.*, p. 349.

To judge from the contents it is a bare skeleton of the well-known story of the Decemvir Appius Claudius and Virginia; it is only the essential features that have been adhered to amid the many deviations in the detail. Appius appears at the very first as possessing a violent passion for Virginia, and as having formed the plan of bringing her to his house with the help of his client Claudius, who claims her as his daughter. Virginius is not in the field, Virginia is not betrothed to Icilius (the latter does not appear at all); all the small features that give colour to the picture, all the individualising accidental and collateral circumstances which give life, light, and shade, are wanting. After Appius, without more ado, has commanded the father to deliver up Virginia till the affair has been decided, Virginius bursts out into the words:—

‘O man, o mould, oh muoke, o Clay, o Hell, o hellish hounde,
O false judge Appius, etc’

and Virginia entreats to be killed. This takes place between the scenes, and Virginius goes to Appius and tells him what he has done. The latter invokes Justice and Reward to punish the murderer, and they actually appear, but condemn Appius himself to suffer death. He is accordingly led off by Virginius, but as we afterwards hear from the latter, Appius has killed himself in prison. His accomplice, Claudius, is condemned to the gallows, but is pardoned at the intercession of Virginius; it is only Haphazard, ‘the Vice,’ who in the end is actually hanged. Besides Justice and Reward, there appear the other allegorical figures of (Conscience, Comfort, Rumour, Fancy, Doctrina, and Memoria, without, however, interfering with the action; the two last-mentioned figures appear only at the end, in order to erect a monument in honour of Virginia’s virtue. The double nature of Haphazard forms, as it were, the mediator between the allegorical and the historical personages. He is a species of Every Man’s man, but appears more particularly to be in the service of Appius; he is at the same time the clown of the piece, and, together with the servants of Virginius (Mansipulus, Mansipula and Servus), who are of exactly the same mind as himself—

plays the coarse comic scenes, which in this case, again, are appended to the main action like a vulgar and inappropriate decoration. The piece, as a whole, is distinguished only by the fact that in the tragic portions we find the first, although, indeed, unsuccessful attempt, to form an actual *pathetic* diction, and that accordingly the most vulgar farce alternates with the most exaggerated, most lamentable pathos. In this respect the piece may be regarded as the first point of transition to Kyd's and Marlowe's tragedies (for it certainly was performed upon the popular stage, as is evident from the stage directions). The verse is the Alexandrine with fourteen syllables, as in Preston's 'Cambyses'; still, we also meet with very short lines with alternate rhymes, as in Skelton.

The allegory by degrees dropped more and more out of the action, and disappeared, as it were, into the extremities, until, finally, allegorical figures, like Vengeance in the celebrated 'Hieronimo,' and in 'The Spanish Tragedy,' or of Fortune and Death in 'Soliman and Perseda'—accompany the action only in the form of a prologue or chorus.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST REGULAR COMEDY.

BEFORE, however, the Moralities began to be thus transformed into actual dramas in the manner and by such plays as were discussed in our last chapter,* and before the Miracle plays, by such attempts as 'Jacob and Esau' and other pieces of a similar kind, came within a closer proximity to their highest perfection, which was attained by George Peele's 'David and Bethsabe' (the oldest known example of a regular drama from Bible History), *Comedy, with the help of ancient examples*, arose out of Heywood's Interludes, and, in some instances, manifested so great a degree of development, that these have been justly hailed as the first regular dramas. The earliest piece of this kind was not discovered till the year 1818; up to that date 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' was thought to be the oldest. It was written by Nicholas Udall, a scholar, who was born about the year 1505, and after 1534 and for several successive years was headmaster of Eton, afterwards headmaster of Westminster, and died in 1556.† The play, in all probability, did not appear in print till the year 1566: but as it is already mentioned in Wilson's 'Rule of Reason,' as early as the year 1551, it must have been generally known at that time; nay, to judge from some allusions occurring in the play, it was perhaps written between the years 1530-40.‡ It bears the title of 'Ralph Royster Doyster,' and the author himself in the prologue calls it,

* To these plays, in the domain of comedy, may further be added, *Tom Tiler and his Wife*, *The Disobedient Child*, by Thom. Ingeland (both written between 1560-70), and some others. (Collier, *L.c.*, p. 353 f. 360 f.)

† For further details about him and his life see W. D. Cooper's edition of *Ralph Royster Doister*, a Comedy by N. Udall, and the *Tragedy of Gorboduc*, etc. (Printed for the Shakespeare Society, London, 1847); Introductory Memoir, p. xi. ff.

‡ Collier, *Hist. ii.*, 446 f.

'a Comedie or Interlude.*' Ralph Royster Doyster is the name of the hero, a young London coxcomb, full of arrogance, conceit, and self-sufficiency, which are encouraged in him by Matthew Merrygreek, a person something between a servant, friend, and cousin. The plot is very simple: Ralph becomes enamoured of Christiane Custance, a rich widow, who is, however, already betrothed to Gawin Goodluck, a merchant, and during the latter's absence, Ralph endeavours to win her love in all possible kinds of ways. He first comes himself, serenades her, and seeks to win over her maid-servants, leaving a letter, which, however, the fair widow does not read. He then sends her presents, and packs off Merrygreek to see how his offerings of devotion are accepted. Dame Custance, however, tells the latter that she intends remaining faithful to her Gawin, and that she despises his master. Thereupon, Ralph tries his luck in his own person, and declares his love, but, in receiving back his letter and presents, is contemptuously rejected. Finally, he decides to use force and to storm the house, but the faithless Merrygreek betrays him—in doing which he declares that he made a companion of Ralph merely to make fun of and to ridicule him—and Ralph is driven to an ignominious flight by Custance and her maid-servants. Meanwhile, Gawin Goodluck has received the news through a blundering servant that Custance has been unfaithful to him, and that she has entered into a relation with Ralph. This misunderstanding is, however, soon cleared up on his return, and as Ralph, by means of Merrygreek, sends in an apology, the play ends in general satisfaction and reconciliation, by Ralph being invited to the wedding-

* The first to give the name of tragedy and comedy to a dramatic poem was the already mentioned J. Bale (1538). Previously the term tragedy had been applied to a solemn poem written in a lofty style, the term comedy to a cheerful poem, or one written in the language of common life. Even in the latter end of Elizabeth's reign, Churchyard gave the name of tragedy to some elegies, and Markham did the same in regard to an heroic poem. Interlude, after the time of Henry VIII., was the usual name given to every dramatic entertainment, and remained so down to the time of Elizabeth. However, in a public record of the year 1574, there is a definite distinction made between Tragedies, Comedies, and Interludes, the latter including the Moralities.

feast. The epilogue, in which the actors express their good wishes for the Queen, the Church, and the Nobility, must have been added after the revival of the play in the reign of Elizabeth, or by the publisher of the print.

Udall, in the prologue, intimates that he was desirous of emulating the examples of Plautus and Terence; and in fact the play has the fault of most dramas produced under the influence of ancient writers. It is too long for the great simplicity of the plot, too poor in action, too rich in discourses and expositions. Doubtless, however, Udall was also influenced by Heywood's Interludes, and hence the want of action, and the length of the conversations might also be laid to his account. This is supported by the many scenes of quarrel and fighting, of which there are an abundance in the play; nay, the whole drama is but an elaborate dispute between the importunate and dissolute Ralph and the faithful and virtuous Custance. Lastly, it also possesses a slight resemblance to the Moral plays; Merrygreek is evidently the individualized Vice of the Moralities, as is shown by his inclination to mischievous jokes and his delight in bringing about all kinds of embarrassments and misfortunes, in which he tries to involve the dramatic characters (in this case especially Ralph). Generally, at least, he entirely resembles the Vice in some of the above-mentioned plays, in which—already more or less individualized—he sometimes appears also under a special name besides that of Vice. The versification is akin to those longer lines which incline to the Alexandrines, without however being actual Alexandrines, and which, it seems to me, were very probably intended to be free imitations of lines in Plautus and Terence, more especially of the former. Perhaps even Skelton followed those antique models. But it may have been through Udall that this species of verse—leading over to the Alexandrine—became established on the stage; he, at least, handles them throughout, most consistently and most skilfully.

Although in 'Jack Juggler'—a new Enterlude, both wytte and very playsent^{*}—Vice still appears under his

* Printed, according to the entries at Stationers' Hall, in 1562 and 63. but from internal characteristics and indications was written by

own name, yet the play has as much right to be classed among regular comedies as 'Ralph Royster Doyster.' The author himself says in the prologue that it is an imitation of the first comedy of Plautus. The subject, however, is treated in a much more simple manner, and turns upon the successful and amusing attempt of Jack Juggler, by means of a disguise, to bewilder Jack Careaway, the thick-headed servant of a Mr. Bongrave, as to his person and his own identity, and finally to make him believe that 'he is not himself but another man.' This gives rise to all kinds of mischief befalling him; Dame Coy, to whom his master sent him, causes him to be well whipped, etc. From this alone it is obvious that this play also was produced under the influence of Heywood's Interludes and of antique models; even the versification bears some resemblance to that of 'Ralph Royster Doyster.'

I shall pass over 'The Misogonus,' a play which Collier discovered in a mutilated manuscript, and which was composed in 1560, no doubt under the same influence; on the one hand the Latin-Greek names of the principal dramatic personages, as well as their characters, especially those of the two old men—Philogonus and Eupelas—and their relation to their servants, remind one of classic comedy; but on the other hand, it appears to be more popular in character, and contains figures from the lower spheres of common English life, which prove that the unknown author wrote more for the multitude than for a refined audience. 'Jack Juggler,' and 'Ralph Royster Doyster,' were no doubt originally written for the same public.* Hence 'The Misogonus' forms the transition to John Still's 'Gammer Gurton's Needle,' the well-known comedy, from which formerly it was customary to date the origin of the regular English comedy.

John Still, afterwards bishop, doubtless knew the ancient authors as well as N. Udall; it is also probable that he was not unacquainted with Udall's dramatic attempts, and indeed with all the plays just mentioned, some of

the unknown author, at least as early as the reign of Mary, the Catholic.
(Collier, ii. 363 ff.)

* Collier, *L.c.*, p. 464 ff.

which were either printed, or restudied, that is, warmed up again, at the time when 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' was first performed.* Yet in his work we no longer find a single trace to remind us of ancient comedy. It is thoroughly popular, its scene the lower stratum of English common life, its principal figure a crafty, intriguing beggar, and scenes of quarrelling and fighting form the main points of the play. We may, therefore, assume that it follows Heywood's Interludes and their further development, except that, in place of a single scene, it is a complete drama, containing a continuous plot, and that the representation is no longer centred in the dialogue but in the action. This turns upon a lost needle, the great importance of which is at once recognised, as a matter of course, in a truly comic manner, by all the dramatic persons, down to the judge who does not appear till the very last scene. The needle was lost when Dame Gurton was engaged in mending the trousers of her servant Hodge, which she had hastily thrown aside in order to drive the cat from the milk bowl. This needle, which disappeared in so unaccountable a manner, puts the whole house and the neighbourhood into confusion, gives rise to a fight with fists and nails, between Dame Gurton and her neighbour Dame Chatte, procures the priest of the parish—who has been requested to interfere—a sound thrashing, and threatens to involve all the dramatic characters in a terrible legal action for damages. Finally, however, the judge settles the affair by discovering the various falsehoods, wiles, and devices by which Dikkon, the Bedlam beggar—a species of beggar who, by assumed insanity, sought to excite pity—occasioned the whole confusion. In the end even the needle itself is found in Hodge's trousers. It is obvious that the whole affair is a popular farce; as such the play† is not without its merits. The plot is introduced in a natural way, and as naturally unravelled. The characters, even though simple and ordinary, are drawn with decision and accuracy, and remain true to themselves throughout. The wit is indeed coarse, grotesque, and material to a degree, but is by no means devoid of comic

* In 1566. Collier, p. 444 f.

† Printed first in 1575; reprinted in Dodsley, *L.c.*, ii. 6–82.

power. The language is a reflex of the popular tone, even with the differences of dialect and shades of the popular jargon; like the wit, it is frequently very coarse, but drastically animated, the dialogue is good, and not without a certain richness of expression. And as the first and most necessary requisite of the drama is action, the play, in spite of its many defects, stands, in its own sphere, even higher than the first regular tragedies which appeared contemporaneously. The versification is generally the long (fourteen-footed) Alexandrine, except that as in other plays of the time, it is more freely treated and bound by no definite measure, but frequently expanded to an immoderate length.

It was natural that upon a popular stage like that of England, comedy should succeed in becoming dramatically developed before tragedy. For when the drama, as we have seen, after separating itself from the Church and passing over into the hands of the people, became an element in the festivals and amusements of the people, comedy must necessarily have predominated over tragedy so long as the latter, instead of unfolding the depths of passion and emotional life, was still confined to the dry seriousness of moral instruction. Comedy stands nearer to common reality than tragedy. When it came to be the question to raise the drama out of the ideal sphere of the Mysteries and Moralities, and to secure it a place in the midst of real, natural life, when accordingly men commenced to study nature, and to copy reality, they also gave their attempts that form in which common reality generally presents itself, that is, the form of the comic—in other words, they began with cultivating the field of comedy. Tragedy could not take a higher flight or attain the same goal, till the drama—as comedy—had already conquered the domain of reality, and thereby acquired a regular form. Therefore the more rapidly that comedy advanced in its development, the more it received the approbation of the people, and established itself in the taste of the public. This explains how it is that in these earlier dramas belonging to the order of tragedy, such as ‘King Cambyzes,’ ‘Appius and Virginia,’ &c., nay, that even in the first sketch of Marlowe’s ‘Tamburlaine,’ and

in the tragedies of that time, we find introduced common comic characters and scenes, which, without having any connection with the tragic action, evidently owe their existence merely to the predilection of the people for comedy.

In this respect the course of the development of the English as, in fact, of the whole modern drama, shows a remarkable difference from that of the history of the Greek theatre; in the case of the latter, the development is just the reverse, tragedy arrived at maturity before comedy, or at all events, comedy did not do so before tragedy. The difference is, however, easily explained by the difference of their starting points. The worship of gods and heroes, which gave birth to the Greek drama, was a wide-branching mythology, with a great variety of material, where either the dark deeds of a struggling, mighty, and grand age of heroes, or the deep, earnest thoughts of a rising and higher mental culture were symbolically clothed in the form of history; the Deity appears everywhere in human form, merely as the ideal reflex of man. In dramatising this material, the form had of necessity to assume that of tragedy. The Christian religion and its form of worship, on the other hand, turns upon a few grand facts, the religious substance of which has so general an importance that, by embracing all men, all times and all places, it, so to say, bursts the fetters of history. The Divine in the Christian sense was connected with the Human only in the one form of the Saviour of the world; there was wanting the variety of the stages of transition, of the demi-gods and heroes, with their tragic actions and fortunes. In short the subject-matter offered by Bible History was partly too general, partly too simple, and partly contained too little of deeds and action. Accordingly, the Mysteries, which ought in a natural progressive development to have become regular tragedies, were not capable of such a development. Their province had in the first place to be abandoned, they had in fact first to gain the point of transition to the actual world of humanity, before they could become free, no longer religious, but, artistic dramas. Tragedy, therefore, could not advance in a straight line from its original starting point; it had first

to descend in a wide curve to profane history, and endeavour to connect it organically with Sacred History, before it could attain its goal, that is, to conceive universal historical events to be acts as much divine as human. In short, the Christian conception of the world and life contained, it is true, a more profound view of the tragic than the Greek, but the Christian religion did not directly supply sufficient nutritive matter for the growth of tragedy. This matter tragedy had to procure elsewhere and to assimilate it with the Christian idea of tragedy, in order that the idea might be represented in it.

Therefore, comedy not only got the start,⁶ but tragedy was also more in need of the examples and the teaching of the ancients, than her light-headed sister. Comedy could draw directly from life, and it was only in regard to form and composition that she required a good school; tragedy, on the other hand, had not merely to gather her subjects from all quarters, but she had in the first place to learn of what, in fact, the nature of tragedy consisted. Accordingly it was tragedy which first clearly and decisively exhibited the influence which the ancient drama exercised upon the development of the English theatre. And yet we should be mistaken were we to imagine that Seneca and Euripides, so to say, *produced* the regular English tragedy, even in the sense in which we can say that they represent the father's place in regard to the so-called classic tragedy of the French. The influence of the ancient drama in England was rather, in all cases, merely co-operative, not itself a general model, but only a single motive in the development, which as such was incapable of destroying the popular form of dramatic poetry, and of directing its course of development upon the mistaken road of a slavish imitation. The vital germ of the English drama was, and remained, the original and rapidly advancing culture of the nation. The effect of the Reformation upon this culture was like the advent of a people's coming of age. By protesting against the despotism of the papacy and its worldliness—the dead formalism and the pomp of the Catholic Church, with its justification by works—by proclaiming the freedom of the mind, which rests upon the living faith and which is

required by the Gospel itself, by its independence of all merely external, temporal and finite ordinances, and by thus asserting its internal infinity, the Reformation itself appears but as the first and most important sign of the awakened self-consciousness of the Christian nations. The period of the *epic* clinging to the Past and its tradition, and the *lyric* dreams of an ideal system of Church and State and of an ideal Future for its realization—in like manner, the epic striving after an heroic activity of the individual, the epic life of chivalry with its battles and wanderings, and, in contrast to it, the lyric delight in fixed seclusion, small pleasant circles and communities—these two tendencies which characterise the Middle Ages, had ceased to exert any influence. The age had of itself become *dramatic*. The transition to it is revealed to us in the flourishing condition of the plastic arts, which supported the first beginnings of dramatic art, and which on its part arose out of that love of sight-seeing, and that longing to have that which moved the inmost soul presented to them in a living form. The drama is the poetry of the Present, where Past and Future meet; it is the image of history, in so far as the latter continually proceeds as much from the Past, that is, from the firm substance of what has Become to Be—the Existing—as from the freely flowing spontaneity of the dramatic characters with their plans which extend into futurity; it is the reflex of the mind in this its own growth, in its own ever freely flowing, living Present, which shows it the forms of poetry, in their true and legitimate character; for this very reason it is the poetic expression of the *self-consciousness* of the mind, which knows that *its* ethical and intellectual development is the aim of life, *its* history, the history of the world.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST REGULAR TRAGEDY.

THE course of the development of the English drama, down to the point when it began to form itself according to this general conception of dramatic poetry, is distinguished above all others by the fact that, with great precision, it adopted only so much of what was foreign as it required for its own development, and that it knew how to assimilate to itself the matter thus adopted, as rapidly as it did thoroughly. Hence it only proved an advantage to the drama that, from the sixteenth century, the influence of ancient art and literature continued to increase, not merely in poetry, but in the whole culture of the nation. It became the custom to exercise the students of schools and universities in free translations from the ancient dramatists. Soon, also, together with the translation, plays written by the students themselves, partly in Latin, partly in English, but worked out according to the ancient models, were acted in the lecture and assembly halls. These performances, in which the young men took uncommon pleasure, gradually became open to the public; from the universities the exhibitions passed over into the schools of the lawyers, into the courts of law and into town halls, and upon festive occasions or upon a visit from the Queen, they were the most popular entertainments. Between the years 1559-1566, Jasper Heywood and some others, as already said, published seven tragedies of Seneca, with additions in the English translation, every act according to the old custom being preceded by a Dumb Show; in 1566, 'The Phœnicians' of Euripides, under the title of 'Jocaste,' was performed from a remodelling by Gascoigne, Yelverton and Kinwelmarsh; and it was probably about the same time when 'Jack Juggler' was brought upon the stage, that the 'Andria' of Terence was translated into English

and performed in public.* The advantage which must by this means have accrued to dramatic art is self-evident. The want of regular dramatic *form*, of artistic *composition*, of the correct estimation of tragedy, and of refinement and grace in comedy, was just the chief defect in those attempts of a regular drama which had arisen out of the Moral Plays and Interludes. In this respect the more modern art—and moreover not merely poetry, not merely tragedy but comedy also—might, like painting and sculpture, learn an endless amount, and has learnt much from the ancients.† The secret of form, however, is the last and the highest aim in every kind of artistic work. I believe, therefore, that the period, in which, under the influence of the ancients, the English drama commenced to develop the artistic form—an advance which, in its first beginnings, coincides with the transformation of Moralities and Interludes into tragedies and comedies—must be termed the commencement of a new period in the history of the English stage. This third or—if Heywood's Interludes are regarded as marking an epoch—fourth period includes the origin of the Shakspearian drama, and is the time of its highest perfection. In what manner it gradually approached this highest point, has therefore now to be explained more in detail.

In the first place, it is a matter of course that this beginning of an artistic construction of the drama was nothing but a beginning, I have already pointed this out as regards comedy. In plays like 'Ralph Royster Doyster,' 'Jack Juggler,' 'Misogonus,' and 'Gammer Gurton's Needle,' the action is still devoid of anything like an organic centre; it consists merely of a series of comic scenes, which turn upon the unravelling of a simple and in itself an unimportant plot; even the external arrangement of the scenes and the external course of the action is not always to the point: occasionally it is obscure, heavy, and

* Collier, ii. 363, iii. 13 f.

† In the year 1520, Henry VIII., on the occasion of a court festival, ordered a comedy of Plautus to be performed, probably in Latin (Collier, i. 88). This was the first gentle appeal of the antique drama at the door of the English theatre, but more especially of the Court Theatre.

proceeds by fits and starts. It is exactly the same, and in many respects worse, as regards the first regular tragedies. 'The Tragedie of Gorboduc,' or, as it is called in the second edition, 'The Tragedie of Ferrex and Porrex' (in the third it is again 'Gorboduc')—a play written by *Thomas Sackville*, afterwards Baron Buckhorst and Earl of Dorset, Knight of the Garter, and Lord Chancellor of England, in conjunction with *Thomas Norton*, a pupil of the University of Oxford, afterwards solicitor of the city of London—was performed before the Queen in the Inner Temple on the 18th of January 1562, and is the oldest yet discovered example of a regular tragedy. It was printed in 1565, and within a short time ran through a second and a third edition; a proof that it met with approbation and attracted attention.* The subject is extremely simple: Gorboduc, king of Britain, divides his kingdom between his two sons so as to pass his last days in rest. Ferrex, the elder, feels his right of primogeniture thereby wronged, and takes up arms against his brother; Porrex, the younger, anticipates him, attacks and kills his brother. The mother, enraged at the fate of her favourite son, Ferrex, murders the fratricide with her own hand. The people, shocked at this, break out into rebellion and murder the old king, together with the unnatural mother. In the last act the nobles of the country combine in order to suppress the insurrection. They accomplish this, it is true, but Fergus, Duke of Albania, at the same time takes up arms against the others so as to gain possession of the orphaned throne. The other nobles form the resolution to repel this arrogance, and a long political dissertation by Eubulus (secretary to the old king) on the mischief resulting to the state from a division of the kingdom, winds up the play. Nothing, however, is seen of all the bloody deeds and the great events in the first act, these are all merely reported in long, lamentable narratives. The whole piece consists, in fact, of almost nothing but long-winded deliberations and harangues displaying a great amount of political wisdom, or of lamentations over the dreadful occurrences, the

* Reprinted in Dodsley, *l.c.*, i. 117 ff.; and recently again for the Shakspeare Society in the above-mentioned edition of *Ralph Roister Doister*, edited by W. D. Cooper, London, 1847.

depravity of men and the great misery of the times. The first four acts, moreover, regularly end with the exhortations and reflections of the so-called 'Chorus' (that is, four aged and wise men of Britain) about the occurrences of every act; these exhortations are delivered in rhymed stanzas, and intended for the good of the public. The characters are indicated only in their general outlines, without any more accurate development or individualisation. The king is at first rather weakly and obstinate, but afterwards, in his conduct to his criminal son, shows as much energy as toleration. The Queen, from her first appearance, is in a state of vehement excitement, but disappears completely from the scenes after having appeared twice. Ferrex and Porrex differ only in the greater violence and passion manifested by the latter. In the same way the king's counsellors are all alike; at best Eubulus is distinguished only by his greater political wisdom. The same may be said of the two parasites and the four dukes. The latter do not appear till the fifth act; up to that time their very names have not been mentioned. And as the history of Gorboduc and his sons is completely finished in the first four acts, the last act in reality forms the beginning of an entirely new play, which, so to say, ends in smoke. In place of the poetical conception of life, the essence of the whole lies in the dry, prosaic, political maxim, that it is extremely foolish and pernicious to abdicate and to divide a kingdom. The authors, full of political pedantry, do, it is true, deal very freely in general maxims and wise saws, but evidently have only very indefinite ideas as to the demands of poetry, and especially of the drama. In this respect they followed the ancients. The piece is obviously written after the model of Greek tragedy, but more in imitation of Euripides or his caricature Seneca, than of Sophocles and Æschylus; this is clearly shown by the style, language, and composition, especially the harangues of the 'Chorus.' Nevertheless, it is very unantique. For not only is there no trace of the rules of Aristotle, but the Dumb-shows, which precede every act, and which generally announce the action beforehand by an ingenious piece of symbolism, show that the authors could or would not rid themselves of the style of

the English dramas. Their work stands in the same relation to ancient tragedy as blank verse to the iambic senarius. In the same way that the former somewhat resembles the latter, and yet breathes a totally different spirit, and may also be said to give the plastic character and quiet dignity of the senarius (moderating as it does all spiritual emotions) a freer, more active and elastic form, thus depriving the drama of its wide plastic folds, in order to clothe it in a picturesque and more closely fitting garment, as required by painting, so, in exactly the same way Gorboduc only externally resembles his ancient prototypes; internally it is a genuine English production, perhaps, with a Romantic character. By introducing blank verse,* Sackville and Norton have rendered an immortal service to dramatic poetry. No verse is more appropriate for speaking the language of the drama, that is the language of action, and for giving it the artistic form, the flow of the line of beauty, measure and rhythm of movement; no other is so capable of pliantly adapting itself to all the turns of the action; no other can so readily and so unconstrainedly descend either to the lowest plains of prose, or soar up to the sublimest heights of poetry; no other is so well adapted to render both the dialogue of the commonest conversation and the monologue of the stormiest passion, of tender, timid emotion, and of intriguing reflection in everchanging, yet ever essentially the same rhythm. Whether or not Sackville and Norton intended it merely to be an imitation of the iambic senarius, in the form required by the English language, still they handle the blank verse, though by no means in the most perfect manner, yet with a skilfulness which places its great advantage for dramatic diction in the clearest possible light. This at the same time implies, with regard to the language—which in fact is refined throughout, in conformity with the dignity of tragedy, and occasionally seems not devoid of poetic grandeur—that their work is far superior to all the plays which had appeared in the domain of tragedy before the year 1562. The same dignity

* The Earl of Surrey, following Italian models, had again employed blank verse in his translation of the first and fourth Books of the 'Æneid' of Cardinal Hippolito dei Medici.

is manifested by the style of the whole piece, the choice of the subject and the characterisation of the dramatic personages. This more formal refinement, and especially the higher conception of the tragic element expressed throughout the play, gives it so great a significance that it not only accounts for the approval which the piece met with from contemporaries, but for the circumstance that it is, in fact, regarded as marking an epoch in the history of the English drama. Its chief fault is the want of artistic dramatic composition.

This fault is shared to the fullest extent by 'The Tragedie of Tancred and Gismund, compiled by the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple, and by them presented before her Majesty. Newly revived and polished according to the decorum of those Daies. By R. W.'* The play, as is evident from the dedication and the letters of the editor Robert Wilmot, was written as early as 1569 by five gentlemen of the Inner Temple, R. Wilmot at their head, each composing an act, and, as stated, was played before the Queen. It was favourably received, and Wilmot, who had preserved the manuscript, was asked in several quarters to have it printed. It appeared accordingly in the above-mentioned edition in 1592, but 'revived and polished.' The alterations, as is proved by another extant portion of the original play,† do not, as Collier thinks, merely refer to the change of rhymed lines into blank verse, but diction and dialogue appear to be entirely remodelled; however, the division of the scenes, the thread of the action, characterisation and composition, seem to have been left unaltered. As regards the diction, therefore, it must be considered a work of the years 1590-92. In all other points it thoroughly resembles 'Gorboduc,' but is of less value. Although the subject is borrowed from a novel of Boccaccio—the first example of making use of Italian novelists—still the play is obviously worked out upon an ancient model. The contents are as simple as possible: King Tancred, owing to too great a fondness for his daughter, will not permit her—after having once become a widow—to remarry. Gismunda, however, is in

* London, 1592. Reprinted, in Dodsley, *l.c.*, ii. 167-232.

† Dodsley, *l.c.*, p. 160 f.

love with Count Guischart, and grants him a secret interview which degenerates into sexual intercourse; when the King—by an extremely improbable accident—witnesses this scene, and in his rage has her lover put to death and his heart sent to her, Gismunda kills herself. The King, in desperate remorse, follows her example. Of all this, however, we again see nothing, but only hear long and wearisome accounts of what has happened. Of action there is nothing whatever. For this reason also, the characters cannot become properly developed; even Count Guischart makes but a single appearance upon the stage, this merely to deliver a long monologue on love, pain and bliss. Yet the language throughout is again appropriate and dignified, but cold, without power and pathos, more lyricoelegiac than dramatic, and in the earlier, original portions is more ingenious than in the later remodelling. For instance it shows more distinctly than ‘Gorboduc’ and ‘The Misfortunes of Arthur’—which we shall have to discuss presently—a certain endeavour to blend the antique with the then existing English form of the drama, as developed by the Moral Plays and Interludes. Not only was it originally written in rhyme (which, however, has the same rhythm and the same number of syllables as the blank verse), but even in the later version, all kinds of allegorical figures are introduced into the action. Thus the very first scene consists of a long speech by Cupid, in which, surrounded, on the one hand, by Vain Hope and Brittle Joy, on the other by Fair Resemblance and Late Repentance, he boasts of his extensive power, and then declares his intention of again exercising it upon Gismunda, her father and her lover. At the commencement of the third act Cupid appears a second time in order to express his satisfaction at the success of his intrigues; and the fourth act opens with a long monologue by Megæra who, accompanied by the other two Furies, foretells her actions in King Tancred’s house. These allegorical figures were probably intended to be a substitute for the Dumb Shows which are wanting. By the presence of these figures the play stands in direct connection with later dramas, such as Kyd’s ‘Hieronymo’ and ‘The Spanish Tragedy.’ Lastly, it also reminds one of the old Moral Plays in so far as the

Chorus (consisting of Gismunda's maids) not only concludes the first four acts with long lyrical reflections, but that several verses are *sung*.

'The Misfortunes of Arthur'—likewise a piece adapted for the stage by eight gentlemen of Gray's Inn, and played before the Queen on the 28th of February, 1587—was written by *Thomas Hughes* (with the exception of the introduction and some choruses) and printed in the same year.* This play deserves a short notice, partly because it again shows that it was more especially the learned schools of the lawyers and others (at that time known by the name of Inns) which, being affected by the general predilection for the stage, introduced the new element of culture into the English drama, partly also because it proves how great an influence 'Gorboduc' had exercised upon the formation of the plays with an antique tendency, and lastly, because it stands a shade higher than its prototype 'Gorboduc,' no doubt in consequence of a reaction on the part of the popular theatre. For although, even in this case, the action is still extremely imperfect, and the whole piece consists almost entirely of long, either of lyrico-elegiac, or deliberating speeches, from which the chorus after every act draws the general moral, still these speeches are not so didactic and pedantic, but turn upon existing interests, and proceed directly from the passions and affections of the dramatic characters. The latter are more powerfully delineated; especially apparent is the definite and truthful manner in which the avarice, the unbridled love of dominion, the energetic and passionate nature of Mordred is contrasted with the quiet, heroic grandeur of Arthur. The language is not only as dignified and appropriate, but also more animated, more drastic, the blank verse freer and more skilfully managed. And whereas the play of 'Gorboduc' ends in a tame after-play, evaporating, as it were, in an uncertain future which is not in any way represented, we here have a first, even though a feeble, attempt to found the whole action upon a general idea. The piece opens by the ghost of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, whom Arthur had deeply injured and

* Reprinted in the *Five Old Plays, Forming a Supplement, etc.* By J. P. Collier, London, 1833, pp. 5-80.

shamefully murdered, giving an account of what he has suffered, and calling for revenge; he remains, as it were, invisibly present, and then concludes the whole with words expressing his satisfaction with the accomplishment of the work of revenge, and pronounces a prophetic blessing on England and her Virgin Queen. Arthur's tragic fate, the infidelity of his wife, and his death by the hand of his son, to whom he himself had given the death-blow, appear accordingly as the result of a higher retaliating power, of a moral necessity; except that this power stands as it were outside of the action, and that the criminal deeds lie in the oblivion of a Past, above which the Arthur of the Present—in his gentle, thoughtful, heroic greatness, which is throughout represented as his character—has long since risen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THEATRE OF THE COURT.

RICHARD EDWARDS AND JOHN LILLY.

THESE attempts of developing or, it may be, of first establishing tragedy by means of ancient models, went hand in hand with the endeavours made simultaneously to raise comedy in the same way from the low life of the people, into the higher spheres of human society, by giving it more of an intellectual character, more refinement and elegance of form. As these tragedies owed their origin to the festivities arranged for the Queen and her court, so it was no doubt in the Queen's Court Theatre that the first attempts of a more refined comedy were first brought to light. As in the case of the former, the latter also appear to have met with great success; it was felt that a want had thereby been satisfied. The universally popular drama, if in future it wished to afford amusement and satisfaction, had, in regard to external form also, to endeavour to raise itself to a level with the state of the national culture. Particularly famous in their day were the two plays of *Richard Edwards* (music master in the Royal Chapel), composed and published a year before his death, which took place in 1566; these plays were entitled 'Palæmon and Arcitas,' and 'Damon and Pythias.' A contemporary, Thomas Twine, calls Edwards:

. . . . "the flower of our realm
And Phoenix of our age."

The first of these plays is lost; the second, 'The excellent Comedie of two the most faithfullst Freendes, Damon and Pithias, newly imprinted, etc.,' has been reprinted in the latest edition of Dodsley's collection.* In the prologue Edwards calls it 'a tragicall commedie,'

* Printed first in 1571; in Dodsley, i. 180-261.

probably because the subject, the well-known story of the two friends and of the tyrant Dionysius, has a serious colouring. Even the choice of the subject, however, was a mistake; it is obviously too simple, too lyrical, too undramatic. The piece, accordingly, is again wanting in action; long discourses between the Court-philosopher Aristippus and the sycophantic parasite (Carisophus about court life, friendship, etc., then between Damon and Pythias about their mutual love, some good theories as regards the best mode of governing, which the privy counsellor Eubulus imparts in vain to the tyrant; another long discussion between the two friends which of them shall die first, and lastly, a few comic dialogues between the servants Stephano, Jack, and Will, among themselves, and with Grimm the collier fill, at least, one half of the piece without being in the slightest degree connected with the actual subject. The alternating chant between Eubulus and the nine Muses, who suddenly appear (behind the scenes), and also the introduction of the old collier, and the long scene between him and the servants (introduced without rhyme or reason), are especially invented to fill up the interval between Damon's departure and his return. And yet these comic parts, which are borrowed from the popular stage, and are written in the style of popular humour, are, in a dramatic respect, the best parts of the whole play. For otherwise it is heartily tedious with its fine phrases, its many sententious passages, and its display of classical learning—not merely the utterly superfluous character of Aristippus, not merely Carisophus, Eubulus, and Dionysius, but even Jack and Will make use of fragments of Latin and French. The language is indeed refined, but wanting in elevation and elasticity; the piece is still not divided into acts or scenes, and moves clumsily in the usual long Alexandrines with interpolated songs. It is obvious that if the English drama had been confined to the Court, or had come under the sway of the Court theatre with its tendency to follow the antique, it would very likely have become as stiff, frosty, and unnatural a thing as French tragedy in the time of Louis XIV.

Of the fifty-two dramas which, according to the 'Accounts of the Revels at Court' between 1568-80, were performed

before the Court, and which have unfortunately all been lost—no less than eighteen (to judge from their titles) were borrowed from ancient history and the heroic legends,* and all were more or less founded upon antique models. ‘The History of Error,’ which was played on New Year’s Eve, 1577,† was undoubtedly an imitation of the ‘Menæchmi’ of Plautus, and probably formed the groundwork of Shakspeare’s ‘Comedy of Errors.’ Among these pieces there were no doubt many in the style and character of the above-mentioned works of Edwards. Authors at this time also turned their attention to the Italian Theatre in order, by means of its more refined culture, to polish the coarse manners of the English popular stage. Thus, for instance, *George Gascoigne* translated Ariosto’s comedy of ‘Gli Suppositi’ into English, under the title of ‘The Supposes.’ It was performed in 1566 in Gray’s Inn before the Queen, and appeared in print the same year.‡ But as it is a pretty faithful translation of the original, in its first prosaic form, it possesses but little interest for us here.

The real creator of Court comedy was *John Lilly* (Lyly, Lillie, Lillie, or Lily). He was born in 1554, entered the University of Oxford in 1569, and there took his degree of B.A. in 1573, that of M.A. in 1575.§ His best known work, and the one which more especially established his celebrity,

* Collier, ii. 24 f.

† Collier, i. p. 237.

‡ Reprinted in Hawkins, *l.c.*, iii. 7–86.

§ These dates from Wood’s *Athenæ Oxoniensis* and the *Oxford Register* do not agree with those given by the editor of the ‘*Old Plays being a Continuation, etc.*’ (i. 199) and with him Collier (*l.c.*, i. 240) who place the second of Lilly’s two petitions to the Queen (in the Harley collection),—in which he mentions his thirteen years at court and intimates that they were spent in the writing of plays—in the year 1579. For according to this Lilly must have been in the Queen’s service, and have written plays as early as 1566, and hence could not have entered the University of Oxford in 1569. In the second edition of my work I drew attention to this contradiction; F. W. Fairholt, the editor of Lilly’s dramatic works, now explains that the two petitions are without date, and that the supposition that the first of them belonged to the year 1576, the second to 1579, was founded only upon a remark made by Oldys (*MS. notes to Langbaine in Brit. Mus. Lib.*), who has obviously made a mistake. See *The Dramatic Works of John Lilly with Notes and Some Accounts of his Life and Writings* by F. W. Fairholt, London, 1858, i., p. xvii.

the first portion of which appeared under the title of 'Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit, verie pleasant for all Gentlemen to read,' etc., was probably printed as early as the year 1579. It is a moralising narrative, in which not history, but tedious reflections on love, fidelity, and wisdom, together with advice on wit and the art of witty and elegant representation, play the chief parts, and concludes with rules about the better education of children. The second part, 'Euphues and his England, containing his voyage, etc.,' probably also printed in 1579,* is a description of a journey through England, interwoven with similar reflections and eulogies on English ladies; it interests us only in so far as for some time it was considered by the higher classes of English society as a model of refined and cultivated diction. Anthony à Wood, in his *Atheneæ Oxoniensis*, makes the remark: "In these bookes of Euphues 'tis said that our nation is indebted for a new English in them, which the flower of the youth thereof learned." W. Webbe, in his 'Discourse of English Poetry' (1586), commends his eloquence and his excellent composition of words and sentences, his appropriate expressions, elegance of form, fluent language, etc., and Blount, the editor of Lilly's six comedies in 1632, says:—"That beautie in court which could not parley Euphuisme, was as little regarded as shee which now there speakes not French."† No doubt as regards language it was not merely Lilly's 'Euphues' but also his dramas, which were written in a similar style, that exercised a considerable influence upon the development of English comedy. His chief merit, however, in my opinion, is that he had the courage to write in *prose*. Gascoigne's above-mentioned translation of Ariosto's 'Suppositi' had, it is true, likewise been written in prose, and is the oldest yet known example of dramatic prose in England; but then it was only a translation, which seems to have met with but little success, and Gascoigne was not the man to exercise any lasting influence upon literature (this is evident from his miserable production, 'The Glasse of Government, a tragicall Commedie'). We may therefore with perfect justice regard Lilly as the first to build on the field of prose in

* Fairholt, *l.c.*, i. xvi. f.

† Fairholt, p. viii. f. xxxii.

the domain of the English drama. The novelty of this phenomenon, the unconscious want which was thereby satisfied, its necessity for the further development of dramatic art, was, in my opinion, the chief reason why his affected language, with its far-fetched puns, artificial similes, and the perpetual recurrence of learned allusions to ancient mythology, history, and literature, met with so much approbation, that we even find the chords which he was the first to strike, re-echoed in Shakspeare's earlier comedies.* The English, and in fact, the whole modern drama, in the course of its development, had necessarily to work its way through the school of prose. Prose, as regards the external linguistic form, is the representative of actual existing reality, of the external body of history; verse represents its inner poetical character, the thought, the ideal domain. Inasmuch as the Greek drama, before attaining its highest perfection, had never passed along the high road of prose, but continually played upon the green meadows of rhythm and verse, its foot remained too tender and did not venture to touch the coarse reality of *historical* life. Owing to this it retained its lyrico-idealistic character, on account of which its most perfect productions are inferior to the Shakspearean drama. In the same way as the substance of Ideal and Real, Soul and Body, Matter and Idea had to impenetrate each other if the result was to be a drama in the highest sense of the word, so in regard to the form of the expression, the old distinction between the language of the 'blessed gods,' and the idiom of 'ephemeral men,' had to cease. A medium had to be found, wherein prose and poetry could meet, and which was as readily capable of being resolved, by imperceptible

* Gervinus (*Shakspeare*, i. 105) and A. Mézières (*Prédécesseurs et Contemporains de Shakspeare*, 2me édition, Paris, 1864, p. 60 f.) are of opinion that Lilly borrowed his style from the Italians and their pastoral poets, Petrarchists and Platonists. And yet a style of language very much akin to his own became developed in the higher classes at the time of the so-called Renaissance, with the endeavour to surpass the refined and elegant style of composition of the Latin Classics, and to display classical culture and erudition. Lilly carried this endeavour no further than its extreme limit, and at the same time possessed the talent of giving it a corresponding English expression. Compare F. Bodenstedt: *Shakspeare's Zeitgenossen und ihre Werke*, Berlin, 1860, vol. iii. p. 10 f.

transitions, into simple prose, or of being transposed into the most high-sounding and lyrically flowing rhythms. This medium, as already shown, was found in blank verse. Lilly, so to speak, conquered another domain and added it to this medium, which, by a happy chance on the part of the author of 'Gorboduc,' had already obtained a place in English tragedy. Blank verse occupied the position between these. Henceforth, therefore, the drama could directly clothe every part of its varied subject-matter in the most appropriate linguistic garb, for it could, at will, change between prose, blank verse, and the rich swing of the lyrical rhythm. The lowest acts of common life, as well as the sublimest scenes from the highest regions of history, wit, intrigue, and the playful conversation of comedy which invariably requires prose, as also the heaviest, grandest outbursts of tragic pathos, had found their appropriate expression and could be easily combined by a skilful hand. In short, the drama had acquired a language which, like its subject-matter, embraced all domains of life and of history, and thus was capable of re-echoing all the various tones of human life.

When we consider that Lilly to a certain extent was the creator of dramatic prose, it must be acknowledged that he at that early date handled it with an ingenuity worthy of all praise. His diction at least aims at that brevity and precision of expression which is the first requisite of dramatic prose,* his dialogues are usually clever and animated, and he has generally been successful in striking the fundamental tone in which dramatic prose has to move. From a certain point of view, even his affectation, his mannerism, his parade of words, and extravagance of language may be found somewhat excusable. It was at all events natural that prose, upon her first appearance, should look about her for all kinds of finery and embellishments, so as not to be altogether cast into the shade by her sister, who was decorated with rhythm and rhyme. If a novelty wishes to assert itself, it must, above all things, make itself conspicuous; without the above faults and extravagances Lilly would perhaps not have succeeded in making

* Of which Germany, in Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* and *Minna von Barnhelm*, possesses models which will never lose their value.

way for the introduction of prose. In addition to this he wrote for a Court, presided over by an intellectual, but vain and coquettish Queen, who was not only actually distinguished by her refined and learned education, and also desirous of distinguishing herself at any price, but whose taste was still incapable of perceiving the difference between true elegance and mere decoration; this is proved by the approbation which Lilly's very faults excited.

Otherwise Lilly's dramas are but little superior to the degree of culture exhibited in Edward's comedies, to which they are also directly connected in order of time.* All of them (if the so-called Pastorals be classed in the category of comedy) are mere Court comedies, and of them 'Endymion, or the Man in the Moon,' is as it were the Court Comedy *par excellence*. This piece, the oldest known edition of which is dated 1591,† is one great and elaborate piece of flattery addressed to the Elizabeth-Cynthia, by the latter of which names the Queen is not only eulogised in Spenser's 'Fairy Queen,' but it soon became the epithet by which she was generally known. To her beauty, wisdom and virtue all bow in love and admiration. She not only instructs the ladies of her court about things that are good and lovely, but even good Pythagoras about true philosophy; her kiss breaks the spell which made Endymion fall into a forty years' sleep; her word, the assurance of her favour, makes a youth of the man who has meanwhile become grey with years. It is upon this enchanted sleep, its cause (infidelity on the part of Endymion, jealousy and revenge on that of his lady-love) and his happy deliverance, that the action principally turns within the space of forty years. Cynthia herself experiences no change during this long period of time; she remains for

* Francis Meres, in his literary and critical work *Palladis Tamia, or Wit's Treasury* (1598), evidently mentions the better English writers of comedy in chronological order and names Lilly immediately after Edwards, and as two of Lilly's dramas, *Campaspe and Sapho* and *Phaon*, appeared in print as early as 1584, but were preceded by *The Woman in the Moon*, which the author himself, in the prologue, declares to be his earliest play—it is at least probable that he began to write for the stage as early as 1580 (Fairholt, *l.c.*, i. xxii. xxvii.).

† Fairholt, i., p. xxvii.

ever young and beautiful. For not merely is she Queen of a mighty empire which looks very much like England, but she is at the same time the chaste Diana, and again not merely the goddess of the moon, but also the moon itself, with its silver disc and ever decreasing and increasing splendour. This double flattery which continually leaps over from the allegory into reality, and from the latter again into the former, rocks the play perpetually to and fro, so that it almost makes one sea-sick; otherwise it is of a very dry and serious colouring. The comic portions, scenes in which a few servants and Sir Tophas, a stupid braggart, play the chief parts, stand in no connection whatever with the main action; and yet in spite of the far-fetched puns, they are the healthiest part of the whole play.*

Somewhat better is 'The Pleasant conceited Comedy, called Mother Bombie,'† the only one of his dramas the subject of which is not borrowed from ancient history and mythology. It is an intrigue in which four servants (whom the poet treats partly as English servants, partly as Roman slaves) deceive their four foolish masters in as clumsy and unlikely, as unmotived a manner; still the play exhibits more dramatic life, a more independent character and a certain finish in the composition, whereas his 'Midas,' which was printed in 1592,‡ falls at once into two distinct plays (Midas rewarded by Bacchus, and Midas punished by Apollo), and receives its point merely through the allusions in which Lilly intimates that the foolish, unhappy Midas is intended to be a ludicrous representation of Philip II. of Spain. But even the character of Mother Bombie is in itself a very indifferent production; the composition too is but an external, mechanical combination of various elements, the invention and the delineation of the characters miserable. The four gentlemen, and again the four slaves, and again the four lovers, are so like one another

* Akin in style and character are the other so-called pastorals by Lilly, *Galathea*, *The Woman in the Moon*, *Love's Metamorphosis*, and *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (probably written by him), which Bodenstein (*l.c.*, p. 48 f.) analyses.

† London, 1594; reprinted in Fairholt, ii. 71 f.

‡ Fairholt, *l.c.*, ii. 3 f.

that one might take the others' place without giving rise to any confusion; the gentlemen are as foolish as weak, the servants as stupid as cunning, the loving couples, merely loving couples. All the characters make use of the same language, an English ornamented with some good, some far-fetched puns, antitheses and similes garnished with all kinds of Latin fragments from classic authors; even the servants understand their Latin, and Candius, one of the lovers, translates the principal rules of Ovid's art of loving, to his mistress.

Lilly's works in fact contain nothing but witty words; the actual wit of comic characters, situations, actions and incidents is almost entirely wanting. Accordingly, his wit is devoid of dramatic power, his conception of comedy still not distinct from the ludicrous, which is always attached only to one object; he has no idea of a comic whole. Hence the action in his plays, which in most of them is very poor, runs on externally alongside of the comic element, often without even being affected by it.

Lilly's best piece is the one which, according to the extant editions (together with 'Sapho' and 'Phaon'), appeared first. I allude to the 'most excellent Comedie of Alexander, Campaspe and Diogenes.'* The subject is taken from the well-known story of the magnanimity and self-command with which Alexander curbs his passionate love for his beautiful Theban captive, and withdraws in favour of her lover Apelles. Between these scenes are introduced all manner of comic ones among the servants of Apelles and the philosophers Plato and Diogenes, but more important are the comic scenes between Diogenes, Alexander and various Athenian citizens whom the cynic settles in his usual way. Lilly's wit was here in its proper place, for it cannot be denied that he possessed a most uncommon talent for appropriate puns, witty retorts and antitheses. Although in this case also the comic scenes are only externally appended to the main action, yet there is unquestionably a certain internal relation between the absence of all wants aimed at by Diogenes, and Alexander's self-control. The whole piece is more carefully worked out, the plot as naturally conceived as it is naturally

* London, 1584. In Fairholt, i. 87 f.

unravell'd. There is also more variety in the characters: Alexander, Hephæstus, Apelles, Aristotle and Diogenes are conceived as distinct characters; even the three servants are well drawn. Latin sentences occur, comparatively speaking, but seldom; language and wit appear less artificial. It may be that Lilly from the beginning intended this play for the popular theatre; the double prologue and epilogue show, at all events, that it was not only performed at Court, but likewise in Blackfriars' theatre; the piece is also free from courtly flatteries and allusions.

Accordingly this drama—which in my opinion is one of Lilly's maturer works, and although probably somewhat older than the first print, yet perhaps a later one than the majority of his extant plays—I regard as one of the points of transition from the learned Court dramas with their antique tendency, to the more popular plays of the national theatre, or rather as one of the points which gave rise to their combination. Next to it in merit is *George Whetstone's* 'Right excellent and famous Historie of Promos and Cassandra, divided into Commical Discourses, etc.'* This piece is probably some years older than Lilly's 'Alexander and Campaspe.' For Whetstone, in his dedication, says that he had written it even before 1578, but that he offers it to his friend essentially unaltered as he had no time to make improvements. From the same dedication it is clear that the author took the ancients for his models; for while he severely censures the English popular plays of the day, he commends Menander, Plautus, Terence, and the seriousness and dignity of the Roman stage. This is attested by the frequent occurrence of Latin sentences, the language and the versification which changes between the Alexandrine of ten to that of fourteen syllables, sometimes in alternate rhymes (of which the ten syllables are obviously intended to be an imitation of the iambic-senarius). The choice of the subject, however, and its treatment, show a decided inclination to the unrestrained variety and change which prevailed in the national theatre.

* London, 1578; reprinted in *The Six old Plays*, and is the play upon which Shakspeare founded his *Measure for Measure*, etc London, 1779, vol. i., p. 9 f.

For the subject is the story of Angelo (Promos) and Isabella (Cassandra), with which we are acquainted from Shakspeare's 'Measure for Measure.' Whetstone, however, was unable to work out the rich material (which, like Shakspeare, he surrounds in the framework of by-scenes) into a united whole. He has divided the piece into two separate parts, but in doing so has merely torn the subject asunder; neither the first nor the second part forms in itself a well finished whole. The first concludes with a command from Promos, that Andrugio (Claudio) is to be secretly executed, with his deliverance by the jailer, and with Cassandra's vow to avenge herself and her brother whom she believes to be dead. The second part contains nothing more than the discovery of Promos' foul deed, his condemnation by the King (who does not appear at all in the first part), and his final pardon obtained through the entreaties of Cassandra and her brother. Although the piece as a whole is somewhat stiff and dry, although the action proceeds rather heavily, and although its author but little understands how to pourtray sentiment, emotion, and passion, and although, lastly, in its morâlisising tendency—with its parænetic harangues to the audience, and its grand display of sentences, ever reminding one of the pedantic style of the old Moral Plays—still the play is distinguished from the contemporaneous productions of the antique school, by its rich and varied action, its greater drastic animation and its more ingenious dialogue; whereas when compared with the actual popular dramas, it is undoubtedly, upon the whole, more refined, the subject more skilfully arranged, the action better motivated, and the characters more skilfully delineated.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POPULAR DRAMA AND THE POPULAR STAGE.

UNFORTUNATELY nothing has been preserved of the popular dramas of the period between 1570 and 1585, with the exception of the above-mentioned offshoots of the Mysteries, Moral Plays, and Interludes. Whetstone, in his Dedication referred to in our last chapter, characterises them in the following words: 'The Englishman in this quality is most vain, indiscreet and out of order: he first grounds his work on impossibilities; then in three hours runs he through the world, marries, gets children, makes children men, men to conquer kingdoms, murder monsters, and bringeth gods from heaven and fetcheth devils from hell. And (that which is worst) their ground is not so unperfect as their working indiscreet; not weighing, so the people laugh, though they laugh them (for their follies) to scorn: many times (to make mirth) they make a clown companion with a king: in their grave councils they allow the advice of fools; yea, they use one order of speech for all persons, a gross indecorum; for a crow will ill conterfeit the nightingale's sweet voice: even so affected speech doth misbecome a clown.' Stephan Gosson expresses a similar opinion against the theatre in his 'Plays Confuted in Five Actions,'* where, he says, 'Sometimes you see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, encountering many a terrible monster, made of brown paper, and at his return is so wonderfully changed, that he cannot be known but by some posy in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkerchief, or a piece of cockle-shell . . . If a true history be taken in hand, it is made like our shadows, longest at the rising and falling of the sun, shortest of all at high noon: for the poets drive it most commonly unto such points, as may best show the majesty of their pen in tragical speeches,

* London, 1580.

or set the hearers agog with discourses of love, or paint a few anticks to fit their owne humors with scoffs and taunts, or bring in a shewe to furnish the stage when it is bare.' Another point is brought forward by Sir Philip Sidney (a great admirer of Aristotelian unities), in his 'Apology of Poetry' (1583); after having accused English tragedies and comedies of disregarding both the laws of 'honest civility' or skilful poetry, after even finding fault with 'Gorboduc' (which, however, in this respect stands infinitely higher than all the other dramatic productions of the time) for violating the unity of place and time, he ridicules the imperfection of the scenic arrangements which are in accordance with this carelessness, and goes on to say: 'Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden: by and by we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place; then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave; while in the mean time two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?' Sidney then like Whetstone finds fault with authors introducing into one piece an enormous mass of the most heterogeneous matter, mixing tragedy and comedy, and embracing a period of several generations of men; whereas Gosson * observes much in the same strain: "I may boldly say it, because I have seen it, that 'The Palace of Pleasure,' 'The Golden Ass,' 'The Æthiopian History,' 'Amadis of France,' and 'The Round Table,'—bawdy comedies in Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish, have been thoroughly ransacked to furnish the play-houses of London."

In fact it appears that there was produced about this time an enormous number of dramas of all kinds, for, as already remarked, more than fifty different pieces were played before the Court alone, within the ten years from 1570–1580.† It is true that among them we meet with a

* *Plays confuted in Five Acts.* London, 1580, S. Gosson.

† *Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I., etc.* By P. Cunningham. Lond., Pr. f. t. Sh. Soc., 1842.

number of dramas—an Orestes, an Iphigenia, an Ajax and Ulysses, a Narcissus, Alkmaeon, Quintus Fabius, Mucius Scaevola—the subjects of which are borrowed from the Greek mythology and Roman history, and which, therefore, were probably constructed after the model of the ancients. But even the Court does not seem by any means to have exclusively favoured the antique tendency. At all events a number of the titles of other plays show pretty clearly that they originally belonged to the popular stage, or were at least written in its style. Two of them are entitled: ‘The Play of Fortune,’ first performed in 1573, and ‘The History of the Collier,’ 1765; the former was probably ‘The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune,’ of which only a single copy of the old print of 1589 has been preserved;* this was probably the play which first appeared in print in 1662 under the title of ‘Grim, the Collier of Croyden, or the Devil and his Dame,’† but doubtless received its present form from a later hand, probably from William Haughton.‡ It is only one portion of the play, the scene between Grim the Collier, Clak the miller, Shorthose the parson, and Joan, Grim’s sweetheart, that may have retained its original form, whereas the two other parts—the history of the unhappy Devil (who is sent up to earth to assume a human form and to find out whether the women have become as bad as Malbecco maintains, the latter having just arrived in hell) and the story of the love of Honorea, the daughter of the Duke of London—seem to be old as regards subject, but as regards form to be thoroughly remodelled. Perhaps the old historical drama, which is written in prose and entitled ‘The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, containing the Honourable Batell of Agin-court,’ was likewise produced in the beginning of the eighth decade, for Tarleton is recorded to have played in it; therefore it must have been upon the stage prior to his death in 1588.§ If the reader is bold enough to give a general opinion as regards the value, the spirit

* It is analysed by Collier, *l.c.*, iii. 44 f.

† Dodsley, xi. 189–258.

‡ *Henslowe’s Diary*, etc. Ed. by J. P. Collier, London, printed f. t. Sh. Soc. 1845. p. 169.

§ *Six Old Plays*, etc., ii. 319–375. Also Collier, iii. 70.

and the character of the English popular theatre between the years 1570-85—judging it from the above three pieces which doubtless belong to it, and from the oldest and most popular extant works of Kyd, Greene, and Peele (*Hieronimo*, 'The Spanish Tragedy,' *Soliman and Perseda*, 'Sir Clyomon and Clamydes')—he will find the above-quoted remarks of Whetstone, Gosson, and Sidney, corroborated.

In fact the English popular poets of the time evidently did not trouble themselves about the rules of Aristotle, which, as we have seen, were not even strictly observed by the learned dramatists of the antique school; Sidney's doctrinaire recommendation of them was fortunately not accepted. They followed their own path freely and boldly, by always adopting, purifying and working out the elements of culture existing in the people. Their main object was to attract and charm the popular mind; hence they had always to keep close to it, but at the same time to keep one degree above it; they had to turn to those subjects which lay nearest to it, and were intelligible to it, that is, they had to keep to general human motives which at the same time are ever the most popular, and they accepted only such rules and laws as could be combined with such motives without weakening them. To employ these motives as efficiently as possible, and to draw the rules of their artistic labours from that which produced most effect upon still unperverted minds, was their sole aim and object—and this is really the course followed by all genuine artistic efforts, in the undisturbed pursuit of which they will always attain what is highest and best. It was only in the course of a natural progressive development like this that a Shakspeare could appear.

For this very reason the want of proportion and symmetry, and of adequate motives for the incidents and action of the piece occasioned a certain absence of plot which was the chief defect of all these earlier English dramas. That which, in a maturer age of art and under prevailing reflection, the poet readily attains to, is his greatest difficulty in its infancy and youth, while fancy and sensibility predominate. Like a youth in his fervour, the English poet of this period poured forth the images of his fancy, his feelings and affections in an overflowing

fulness, frequently crowding together in one piece several different actions, and piling incident upon incident, frequently also inserting most inappropriate scenes, in order to enliven a bold and unconnected story. The scenes, which generally consisted of detached situations, were arbitrarily arranged; the complication and denouement were often, so to say, lugged in by the ears and as often unnaturally delayed. In short, in the same way that old paintings are mostly happy in individual parts, while the grouping and arrangement of the different figures are frequently indistinct, aimless and incidental, so too in the early English dramas we feel a special want of true artistic composition. That which is generally the most difficult point in all art, must have particularly perplexed the poets and artists of those times. The reason of this was, that the spirit of the more modern art stood in need of a certain abundance of matter, a greater multitude of individual figures, actions and events. Christianity has no mythology; to the Christian view of things the Divine no longer presents itself to man in an objective sensuous shape, and cannot, therefore, any longer exercise an immediate and personal influence on his affairs. Every one bears the Divine within himself. Most of the later nations, however, were not in possession of heroic legends; these had perished with Paganism, which had been exchanged for Christianity, or at least they had vanished from the minds of men. The mythical divinities and heroic figures of the ancient drama, the typical representatives of the general qualities of human nature, were therefore entirely wanting to the English dramatists. They were obliged to keep to real life, to the history of the present and past, and to strive to make the drama become, as it were, its poetical reflex. Consequently, if their productions were to possess a universally valid significance, if the general principles of humanity were to be exhibited objectively, not merely in the characters of the dramatic personages, but also in the action represented, this could only be attained by a representation in which the one and the same thing that occurred in all, was repeated in the greatest possible variety of figures, actions and events, and by this very means proved itself to be uni-

versally applicable. This demand the poet voluntarily obeyed in all cases whenever it sprung up freely from the national Christian culture; and consequently, while the ancient drama, which had its origin in greater lyrical simplicity, was continually enlarging the number of the dramatic characters, the range of subject and the complication of the action, the modern drama followed an entirely opposite course. This is at once proved by the immense extent of subjects chosen for representation in the old Mysteries, and which, even though somewhat reduced at first in the Moral Plays, soon again swelled to the same extent. But to work artistically upon such quantities of material is more difficult than (which was the first problem of Æschylus) to arrange three persons and a chorus in such a manner as to form a well-rounded or harmonious whole. No wonder, therefore, that the earlier English dramatists did not at once succeed in this task; no wonder that much of the multitude of actions and events remained without adequate motive, and that, consequently, the epic element maintained its predominance in so far as the incidents were arranged in simple succession, and as the actions only *happened*, and were not the result of the characters of the dramatic personages and of the position of affairs.

The same reason led the early English dramatists to form an erroneous conception of tragedy. In order to secure for it its due importance and the greatest possible effect, they exaggerated the tragic element to such a degree as to make it hideous and horrible, and to accomplish this they had recourse to the most forced situations, to the delineation of coarse outbursts of passion and to a diction which was unnatural, forced, and bombastic. But even Æschylus is accused by Aristophanes with not unfrequently having injured his tragic sublimity by pathetic bombast. Besides this the stronger nerves of a people more familiar than the present age with scenes of suffering of every kind, of death and destruction in real life—recall but the many criminal processes, with all the horrors of the Star Chamber, of the many executions under Elizabeth's predecessors, and even under her own government—would require the most glaring description of tragedy to move them. In comedy this had its counterpart in coarse-

ness and vulgarity; and not unfrequently low buffoonery and obscene jests had to supply the want of an ineffective refined wit. The puns, the favourite form of wit in the popular mind, were often nothing more than a perversion of words; persons of the lower ranks, servants, waiters, and others had the chief parts to play and were the actual exponents of the comic element. The fun was centred in the clown, who on all occasions thrust himself with or without reason into the action, and moreover had the privilege of conversing *ex tempore* with the spectators, of making remarks about little incidents occurring in the pit or gallery, and of throwing his jokes about at random. At the close of the piece it was customary for the clown in a kind of after-play called jig, to give an especial exhibition of his skill, to dance, sing, to make grimaces, and, as an accompaniment, to improvise comic and not unfrequently senseless verses—a custom which Shakspeare has modified in his 'What you Will,' and adapted to his purpose in 'Love's Labour Lost.'

These were the dark sides of the earlier English popular drama, which, however, are not merely relieved by a few separate rays of light, but were themselves but the shadows of a creative, quickening, and brilliant source of light. Poetry, at that time, resembled a luxurious garden, fruitful to excess, a perfect chaos of fermenting elements. Its various productions shot up like rank weeds, its creations were coarse and disproportioned, the shapeless primary forms of a yet uncontrolled creative power. In general, however, it is this very luxurious energy of mind, this swelling, shooting, and teeming of the early spring that delights the intelligent mind and refreshes the child of an enfeebled civilization. Even Shakspeare's poems remind us in many instances of the dark, fantastic wilderness of an untrodden primæval forest, of the free, luxurious soil never yet touched by the plough, in which his works also have their deepest roots.

I believe that the chief excellences of the dramatic popular poetry of this period do not so much lie in their individual creations as in their *general spirit* and in the *general formation* of art. In the fulness of their youthful strength and love of action, poets made a sure grasp

at dramatic art in its inmost essence, that is, at the *action*. Whatever faults their works might possess, *action* was never wanting. The drama, however, is nothing but the poetry of action; to dramatize a subject and to allow it to develop as an action, is one and the same thing. This was felt by the popular poets in consequence of that unerring instinct which directs the course of every undisturbed national culture in all departments. It was to this point therefore, that they directed all their efforts; it was this demand which they endeavoured to satisfy regardless of everything else. It was by this very means that they *established* the English drama, in the first place, by seizing its *substance*. As regards the *form*, the excellences of which I am speaking, were certainly more negative than positive. And yet it was unquestionably a merit of the poets that, although many of them were perhaps not unacquainted with the dramatic laws of the ancients, they scorned to imitate the ancient drama according to these laws. Here also the spirit of romantic* poetry unconsciously and involuntarily made itself felt. As Christianity preached and demanded the freedom of the human mind and its dominion over nature, and as it raised the mind beyond the finite and freed it from the limits of space and time, so it also released art from those fetters which were nothing but the consequence of this state of bondage. Ancient poetry in its sensuousness, its outward definiteness and plastic severity of form, and especially in its clinging to the idea of destiny—by which man was placed beneath the sway, not indeed of a merely natural, but also of a moral, as well as stern and unalterable necessity—required these restraints; its dependence on the forms and laws of *nature*, which lay in its inmost character, had also to appear in its outward form. Romantic poetry, on the other hand, the spirit of which was freedom and personality, was as much obliged to repress these forms and laws. It had to substitute the laws of spiritual beauty for those possessing an *external sensuous*, and hence more *plastic* than poetic beauty

* I use the word here in its most general significance, to make a distinction between the antique or the so-called classic and modern poetry in general.

of form. Not a sensuous unity, that is, a numerical unity of action, but the *ideal* unity of action, that is, the unity of the idea—the view of life and history which can manifest itself in any arbitrary number of actions and events—had to become the principle of the romantic drama. It was not the unity of a sensuously cognisable period, connected with the rising and the setting of the sun, but the unity of the *spirit of the age*, of the *ideal* succession and consequence of things; and likewise not the unity of the outward place, but the unity of *spiritual* space, that is, of *spiritual* relations, of the *ideal* co-existence of things—to which the more modern art had to learn to direct its attention. In the strict observance of these laws lies the beauty of genuine artistic form, the perfection of the dramatic composition, such as is invariably exhibited in Shakspeare, whereas the difficulty of making the right use of the freedom granted by these laws, led the earlier poets into excess and anarchy.

In the same way this mixture of the tragic and the comic—which always existed in the national drama of England from its first beginnings—appeared more arbitrary and accidental in the earlier poets. And yet this also was but the necessary consequence of that peculiarly national culture of mind, which predominated undisturbed in the course of the development of English poetry. Ancient tragedy, because it grew out of the mythical religious ground of the worship of Dionysus, clung throughout, with rare exceptions, to the subjects which were offered by the epic legends of the semi-mythical age of heroes. Their heroes consequently have a plastic-ideal character; they are typical figures of general human significance, and at the same time are typical representatives of the principal features of the Greek national character. There was no need of these being specially delineated, because their personality and their fate were perfectly well known to the Greek public. To invest them with individual characteristics (as Euripides attempted) so as to bring them nearer to actual and real life, would have been wrong, because this would necessarily produce a heterogeneous mixture of foreign elements, which could only offend a fine sense of beauty (this is chiefly the reason why

Euripides, although, according to Aristotle, the 'most tragic' of all poets, is nevertheless inferior to Sophocles and Æschylus). The ideal sphere, in which these typical heroic figures moved, and in which they did not mix with the common people—the usual run of 'ephemeral men'—but only with one another and with the immortal gods, could not possibly be entered by comedy (which has its very root in the individual weaknesses, follies and perversities of the great mass of mortals) without producing a shrill discord. Hence, in the ancient drama, that strict, inviolable separation of the tragic and comic, which the ancients considered so completely a matter of course, that the thought of the possibility of a combination of the two elements never occurred to them. In the modern drama, however, this combination had, from the very commencement, to take up its position, because from the very commencement it placed itself upon the ground of actual life, and in the course of its development from the past events of Bible histories continued by degrees to draw closer to the living present, until finally it treated only of events, actions and persons, which in all cases were but the poetical reflexes of historical reality in the past and present. In real life, however, the sublime and common, tragic and comic, often stand close together, the grand, mighty, and terrible are often followed directly by what is small, weak and ludicrous. However, in order to ennoble these subjects from history and the living present, in a poetical manner, in order to bring them in connection with the sphere of the ideal, by the depth and general truth of the leading ideas, and thus to establish the justification of the combination of the tragic and comic—it indeed required a mind as great and profound as that of Shakspeare. For this reason I must reserve the closer examination of this whole point till we come to discuss the development of the general view of poetry entertained by Shakspeare himself. We may here remark that this combination of the two dramatic elements harmonised with the form and composition of the language in the earlier English dramas. I do not merely allude to the more arbitrary than free exchange of prose and poetry—the latter being generally employed in the scenes of external or internal

sublimity, the former reserved for the comic parts, for the scenes of everyday life, and for characters of low birth, servants and others—but also to the continual change of the whole tone, of the style and character of the diction, which keeps pace with the course of the action, with the coming and going of the various personages, and with the change of situation. Both necessarily enhance the dramatic effect, provided only that the change be not accidental, but such as we find it in Shakspeare, arising always with intrinsic necessity from the subject and from the development of the action.

Before the year 1585, that is about the time of Shakspeare, all the accessories of the theatre, the arrangement of the stage scenery and decorations, occupied a similar and perhaps a lower position than the individual poetical productions. Even in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign we still hear of dramatic representations by privileged actors in Churches and Chapels, but this occurred very seldom. The exhibitions were generally given in school-rooms, lecture-halls and law-courts, in the great Inn-yards, at the seats of the gentry and in the palaces of the great, for which purpose temporary stages were erected. According to Halliwell,* the first public playhouse 'the Theatre' was built in 1576, and that called 'the Curtain,' must also have been erected in the same or at least in the following year, for both are mentioned by John Northbrooke (minister and preacher of the word of God) in a 'Treatise against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes,'† which was entered at Stationers' Hall as early as 1577. Another preacher, named White, in a sermon of 1576 (but printed at a later date) calls the then existing playhouses 'sumptuous theatres' and the Puritan preacher Stockwood, in a sermon of the year 1578, maintains that there already existed 'eight ordinary places' in London where theatrical exhibitions were given; ‡ the majority of

* *Illustrations of the Life of Shakspeare*, etc., Part I. London, 1874. The spot where at one time Shakspeare's dramas were first played and produced such a mighty effect, is now occupied by the printing office of the 'Times,' the first and most influential newspaper in the world.

† Republished for the Shakspeare Society in 1843, p. 85, by Collier, from the earliest edition, about A.D. 1577.

‡ Collier's *Shakspeare*, p. xxvi. Northbrooke, *l.c.*, p. xiv.

these, however, were most likely merely Inn-yards which were occasionally transformed into theatres. It is probable that Whitefriars was erected shortly afterwards, and that between 1584-85, Phil. Henslowe built the Rose.* The cause of these buildings being erected arose from a resolution of the Lord Mayor and the Aldermen of the City in 1575, which not only demanded the revision and special licensing by their officer of every piece to be represented in the city—on account of the performances in the inn-yards having led to disorders and excesses of all kinds—but also (in spite of applications and remonstrances) most strictly enjoined that the players in the City should confine themselves to private representations, and that they should not play at all on Sundays, and only after evening service on Church festivals. Blackfriars' Theatre, according to Halliwell, cannot have been built before 1596. Soon after this six or seven other play-houses were erected, among which the Globe—(with the figure of Hercules supporting the globe, and bearing the inscription *Totus mundus agit histrionem*) which, according to Halliwell, was built in 1599 by the Lord Chamberlain's Company—the Red Bull, the Fortune, and the Cockpit or Phoenix in Drury Lane were the most important. Altogether during the poetical career of Shakspeare there were twelve or thirteen, and subsequently under James I. about seventeen theatres specially designed and used for scenic representations, so that London at that time possessed nearly as many as at the present day when its size is eight times as large. However, plays were not given in all of these theatres at the same time, for some were open only during the winter, others only during the summer; the latter therefore only had a covering over the galleries, frequently merely over the stage, the pit was open and exposed to the weather. One of these was the Globe, of which Shakspeare was a proprietor during the height of his dramatic career; it was a plain wooden building, almost entirely without windows, in which plays were given by daylight. Blackfriars, on the other hand, the second theatre with which Shakspeare was connected, was open during the winter and in the evening.

* Collier, *Memoir of Edward Alleyn*, etc. London, printed for the Fh. Soc., 1841, p. 189.

The oldest theatres, like the stages in the school-rooms, law courts, and inn-yards, were at first without scenic decorations; movable scenery was not introduced till after the Restoration.* The only decoration of the stage consisted of a simple piece of tapestry, which was never changed; when torn the rents were filled up by rough paintings. A curtain across a corner of the stage served to separate the more remote places. A board, bearing the name of the country or town, indicated the place of action, the change of which was effected by the erection of another board. A light blue flag, hanging from the roof, denoted that it was day, a darker one announced that it was night. A table with pen and ink converted the stage into a counting-house; two chairs in place of the table changed it into an inn; by a bed being pushed forward, it became a sleeping apartment. The actors frequently remained quietly on the stage, while these symbols were being removed and altered, and hence they, as it were, travelled from place to place with the greatest possible ease. Even when scenery began to be employed, the board was still retained for the purpose of indicating *which* town, country, forest, etc., was represented, because there as yet existed no change of scene for objects of the same description. In the centre of the back of the stage, was a kind of balcony, supported by two pillars which stood on broad steps. The latter led up to the stage below the projecting balcony, between the two pillars, and could be concealed by a curtain; it was employed for a variety of purposes, for instance it was always the stage upon which the plays, frequently occurring in plays, were performed. The balcony was directly connected with the row of boxes which ran round the interior of the theatre. Those nearest the balcony were reserved for the orchestra, but were occasionally, perhaps, also made use of by the actors, for purposes connected with the representation. Two flights of stairs on the right and left, made the balcony accessible from the stage. "It was these stairs—as Tieck poetically describes it—that Macbeth ascended, and which were likewise used by Falstaff in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor;' on the balcony above, stood the citizens and

* Collier's *History*, iii. 366.

held parley with King John and Philip Augustus below; raised by the steps, sat the King and Queen in 'Hamlet' (V. 2); here stood Macbeth's table at which Banquo's ghost appeared;" no doubt also Desdemona's sleeping apartment, where Othello murdered her, and Juliet's chamber from which she converses with Romeo and takes leave of him on the wedding-night, was represented by the balcony.*

Such, nearly, for precise chronological information on this point we do not possess, may have been the state of the stage, scenery and decoration at the beginning, and during the first half of Shakspeare's artistic career. Schlegel and Tieck have endeavoured to prove that this simplicity offered many advantages, compared with the complicated mechanism of our costly contrivances, which are intended to effect so much and can do so little, and which by the continual and noisy changings rather tend to disturb, than enhance the illusion, at least in Shakspeare's plays. This at all events is certain, that the simplicity tended more to excite the imagination of the spectators, and did not draw their attention from the centre of the representation, from the actual drama, to direct it upon secondary affairs, that is, upon the devices of mechanicians and scene painters; but this, it is true, was only appropriate for a period in which the idealistic imagination still played a part, and not, as at the present day, when the realistic understanding governs all life. At the time of the culminating point of Shakspeare's genius (about 1600), some improvements, had, it is true, been made even in these things. Imitations were now furnished of rocks, graves, altars, lions and dragons, dogs and horses; nay, even Phaeton's chariot, the trees of the Hesperides, a bedstead, two church towers, the city of Rome, a rainbow, and sun and moon are mentioned in old theatrical accounts, for instance in those of the Lord Admiral's company of 1598. However, the old simple arrangement was generally retained, and the above mentioned articles must be regarded rather as exceptionally occurring decorations, which probably passed over from the representations at Court

* Compare N. Delius: *Ueber das Englische Theaterwesen zu Shakspeare's Zeit.* Bremen, 1853.—A. Dyce: *The Works of W. Shakspeare*, 2nd edition, London, 1864, vol. i. p. 40 ff.

and from the palaces of the great, into the possession of the popular theatre. The poverty of the latter formed a striking contrast to the splendour of the dramatic performances, more especially to the masques played before the Court. In the case of the latter the actors shone in gold and silver, velvet and silk; and of course all the decorations were more numerous and more artistic. Castles, houses, arbours, altars and tombs, rocks, caves, etc., were not uncommon, but frequently rather too natural; for, in order to represent a forest, real trees were cut down and planted, or (as in the play of 'Narcissus'), a live fox was let loose and chased by the hunters. Theatrical contrivances of this pompous description, when no longer required, were sold and bought up by the popular play-houses, so that some of them in many respects may perhaps have been able to rival the royal representations. As regards dresses they do not seem to have been satisfied with purchases from the Court theatre, but appear to have indulged in an extreme luxury in this respect, on their own account. If, as according to recently discovered documents, the brothers Alleyn in 1591, could have paid the sum of 20*l.* 10*s.* for a black velvet coat,* there need be no exaggeration in the report of an actor, as related by R. Greene in his 'Groat-worth of Wit,' boasting that his share in the theatrical wardrobe was worth 200*l.*, or of pious people complaining that two hundred actors might be seen swaggering about in silk garments, while five hundred poor citizens were in want and hunger.†

The poetical licence, which the stage presented, corresponded with the liberties which the spectators took and which the actors generally enjoyed. The common people frequented the cheapest places, the pit (hence were called Understanders, Groundlings,) and the gallery. The higher classes sat in the 'rooms,' which were situated above the pit and below the gallery and, as already said, were directly connected with the stage. The gentlemen occupying these seats had the right in many of the theatres (especially in all of the so-called private theatres ‡) of going

* See *The Alleyn Papers. - A Collection of Original Documents, etc.* Ed. by J. P. Collier, London, pr. f. t. Sh. Soc., 1843, p. 12.

† Petition to Walsingham, January 25th, 1586.

‡ The difference between the *private* theatres and the *public* theatres

on to the Proscenium, where they sat on stools or reclined on rush mats smoking their pipes, while the lower orders whiled away the intervals between the scenes with books and cards, cracking nuts and eating apples, with drinking beer and smoking tobacco. This licence, in place of disturbing the public and actors, unquestionably served rather to increase the poetic tension. It allowed of many a witty word, many a pertinent allusion being interpolated by a clever actor, and the character to be represented thereby became individualised. The whole had more the appearance of a cheerful, refreshing, and exalting play of the imagination, which indeed it is and should be, whereas under the pressing weight of our strictly uniform and police-like etiquette it sinks down to the level of a stiff diplomatic society which, like the police, can be anything but poetical. As the stage and the public were not so distinctly separated as they are now, all must have seemed more sociable and more familiar; poets and actors, even by the external appearance of the house, derived the pleasant feeling of a living sympathy with the people, for whose amusement and instruction they had to exert themselves—a feeling which our poets and artists can now scarcely be aware of—whereas it depended only upon themselves and their talents, to gain respect so far, as to prevent undue transgressions. But above all other considerations, there were not so many pretensions as now: the mere appearance of the theatre would again repress in the public all unbecoming pretensions, and pretension is death to all art.

It, in fact, all depended upon the talent, the genius, and the culture of poets and actors as to whether the theatre, in such circumstances, was to rise to the height of true art or to degenerate into coarseness and vulgarity. However, we are justified in forming a favourable opinion

(which had hitherto been very doubtful) is thus distinguished by Collier, iii. 335: Private theatres were of smaller dimensions than public theatres; they had no open space in the centre, but were entirely roofed in; the performances were given by candle or torch light; the audiences, to judge by the prices of the seats, consisted of a superior class of people; the boxes or rooms were inclosed and locked, and these theatres had *pits* furnished with seats. Blackfriars, for instance, was a private theatre.

about this point in general, at least as regards the time of Shakspeare's first appearance. Before this period, the strolling players do not seem to have been held in any high esteem. For a statute of the year 1572 places them still in the same category with prize-fighters, bear-leaders, jugglers, and pedlars, and orders them to be imprisoned as vagabonds, unless they possessed licences from at least two justices of the peace.* But this decree was evidently issued merely against strolling players as a protection to the established companies, and is more fully explained by Chas. Knight. This is even evident from the fact that two years later (1574) five men in the service of the Earl of Leicester (among whom was the already-mentioned James Burbage, the father of the famous Richard Burbage, the friend of Shakspeare, who played the parts of Hamlet, Lear, and Othello in so admirable a manner) obtained the first royal patent, and with it the permission to give representations at Court and throughout England, under the superintendence of the Master of the Revels. Queen Elizabeth appears in fact from the very first decidedly to have patronised the drama.† What considerable support it had met with at Court since 1571 is proved with documentary certainty from the 'Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court,' published by Cunningham. The royal players of Interludes, who were already an institution, continued to exist without interruption during Elizabeth's reign. But in addition to these the Queen in 1582-83 selected, from among the different companies of the great lords, twelve of the best actors, conferred upon them the title of 'the Queen's Players' and paid them 38*l.* 4*s.* annually. They were under the direction of Tarlton, the famous comedian and wit, and of Wilson, likewise a celebrated actor, and were during Elizabeth's

* In later times, however, when the Puritans and their religious tendency continued to gain in power and influence, actors again experienced persecutions from the Lord Mayor and the aldermen of the city who, as it seems, adopted the puritanical notion that plays and players were once and for ever godless things. However, they effected little or nothing. To examine into such things here is of course not my intention. For further details on this point see Collier's *Annals of the Stage*, vols. i. and ii.; the reader will there find everything pertaining to the subject collected with great care.

† See Collier in *Northbrooke's Treatise*, p. vi. f.

reign the first company of the kingdom, compared with which the fourteen companies of the great lords which existed at the same time, between the years 1586 and 1600, were completely thrown into the shade. King James was no less favourably disposed to players; soon after his accession he conferred upon the Lord Chamberlain's company the title of 'Servants to the King, and therewith the right of exhibiting, throughout England, comedies, tragedies, histories, interludes, morals, pastorals, and pageants. His example was imitated by Queen Anne and Prince Henry of Wales; the former taking under her protection the Company of the Earl of Worcester, the latter that of the Lord Admiral the Earl of Nottingham; the one being henceforth called the 'Queen's Servants,' the other the 'Prince's Servants.' Even the Chapel boys of Queen Elizabeth were called 'Children of her Majesty's Revels,' stood under her especial protection, and exhibited their popular representations on different stages, particularly in Blackfriars and Whitefriars.

These boys, who from early youth were trained and educated for the stage, in the course of time naturally became actors of the greatest excellence, unless they were quite destitute of talent and industry. Then the rivalry and emulation of the numerous companies, the members of which were by no means regarded as state servants, appointed and pensioned for life, but as hirelings liable to dismissal, and whose good or bad fortunes therefore depended upon the favour of their patrons and the approbation of the public, necessarily stimulated them to the greatest exertions, and could not fail to be of advantage to dramatic art. And in addition to this there was the general fondness of the people for theatrical performances; this and the esteem in which the better actors were held—such as Shakspeare, Burbage, Alleyn, Heywood and others—must have tended to draw forth and encourage youthful talents. It is therefore not to be wondered at that histrionic art should have kept pace with the advance of dramatic poetry, even though in the twenty years between 1580 and 1600 it had made gigantic strides. As early as the time of Shakspeare's first appearance, actors must have arrived at a not inconsiderable degree of excellence; otherwise they could not have done justice to the

earlier works of the great poet, or even of his older contemporaries. Marlowe's 'Jew of Malta,' for instance, is so difficult a part to play, that the piece has been reproduced, within the first half of this century, on the London stage in order to test the powers of a famous actor. Equally difficult is the part of 'Tamburlaine,' a piece which Marlowe certainly produced about 1586. Shakspeare's 'Titus Andronicus,' and still more so his 'Henry VI.,' requires a number of experienced and skilful actors, and it may safely be assumed that poets, who were actors as well, would not have carried their requisitions beyond the powers of their colleagues. No doubt that extravagant, glaring colouring in the expression of passion and emotion, that empty, bombastic pathos, violent gesticulations and the making of grimaces, which Hamlet ridicules, may have still predominated because it corresponded with the character of the pieces as well as with the taste of the public in general. But that a consciousness of its absurdity was, nevertheless, soon arrived at, and that this false manner was abandoned, is evident from those excellent rules which Hamlet delivers to the actors. The parts in Shakspeare's later pieces require such fine, carefully studied and characteristic acting, his concise and thoughtful language which embraces all the different tones of sentiment and emotion, up to the expression of the highest pathos and of the wildest passion, demands an enunciation so perfect and frequently presupposes as much expressive play of the countenance as silent accompaniment of action, and connects the principal effect of the poem so closely and firmly with the actor's representative skill (as in 'Macbeth,' 'King Lear,' 'Hamlet,' and others), that we are forced to place the powers and capabilities of the latter on a level with the greatness and beauty of the compositions. In fact the fame of Burbage and Alleyn, the distinguished tragedians, and of Wilson and Tarlton, the excellent comedians, and of Nathaniel Field and John Underwood—the latter celebrated even as boys—was so great, that their names are still spoken of, and, supported by the immortal name of Shakspeare, will probably continue to be remembered throughout all ages.

This was about the condition of dramatic art and of

the English stage. at the time (about 1580) when a number of distinguished minds who, in addition to their profession as poets, were men of learned culture, began to devote themselves to the popular theatre. They are the immediate predecessors and earlier contemporaries of Shakspeare, and for this reason alone, deserve to be more particularly characterised, because it is only through them that we can judge how much Shakspeare's genius owed not merely to the past, but also to the present, which was more important for his development. But in addition to this, they have an independent and great significance as regards the history of the English drama. It is they—a fact which has hitherto been quite overlooked—who endeavoured to obtain for the English drama the fruits of thorough *classic* and *learned* studies *without defacing its own essential peculiarities*; it was they who, with the shears of a higher culture, undertook to free the popular growth of the English drama of its excrescences, *without injuring its roots, trunk or branches*, to moderate the rude expression of its power, to regulate its development, and artistically to shape its formation; in short their object was to raise the popular theatre into one for the educated classes, *without depriving it of its popular character*, to polish the rough gem, to give it a proper setting, and to find the right form for the given substance *without changing it*. It was they who paved the way for Shakspeare in so far as they prepared men's minds for the great event of an appearance like Shakspeare, by directing their attention towards a higher and as yet unknown goal; they are Shakspeare's auxiliaries in so far, as they laid the first foundations upon which he could erect his edifice. Shakspeare's poems are directly connected with theirs, in being the fulfilment and completion of their endeavours. For the people had first to become accustomed to a drama, which no longer aimed *merely* at being an amusement and a diversion, but which, at the same time, had a higher object in view; the people had first of all to be incited to make higher demands; they had first of all to be raised above the popular mode of viewing the drama, and to be made to adopt a different standard for forming an opinion, if, in fact, the Shakspearean drama was to become a possibility.

CHAPTER IX.

THOMAS KYD AND THOMAS LODGE.

UNFORTUNATELY there exist, comparatively, but a very small number of the dramatic works of the poets of whom we are now about to speak. All of them were more or less prolific writers; they, however, did not write their plays for the press but merely for the stage, and moreover expressly for one or another special theatre. Their works consequently were never immediately printed, in fact they were frequently delayed and kept back intentionally. For every one of the numerous theatres, on account of competition, had to endeavour to form their own repertoires, and of course grudged other theatres the very works which met with most success. The plays accordingly existed at first in manuscript only, frequently perhaps merely in the separate parts which were copied out, and were not printed till they had served their time, that is, frequently not till some decades after their first appearance; or what was worse, some bookseller, greedy of gain, would get the play written down from the mouths of the actors, while the play was being performed, or procured it in some other underhand way, so as to be able to publish an edition on his own account for purely mercantile interests. There exist stolen prints of this kind, not merely of several of Shakspeare's dramas, but many of the old quartos evidently belong to this category. Of course in these circumstances little or no heed was paid to the author of the piece; he was frequently never mentioned at all on the print or when the piece was performed, hence the public often remained completely ignorant of his name. This in many respects had its advantages, for it encouraged that freedom and independence of poetic productions through which alone the highest perfection can be attained. However, it has done great injury to

the history of literature, for, not only have a number of dramas been entirely lost, but even as regards the extant pieces, we are often unable to ascertain with certainty the author's name, and more frequently the date of the origin of the plays, a misfortune which also renders the historical criticism of Shakspeare exceedingly difficult. Recent historians of literature and the representatives of Shakspearian literature in England have, it is true, made some extensive as well as thorough investigations on this subject which deserve great credit; but still no safe foundation has been arrived at in regard to this point.

The first whom we may here mention, because he is probably the oldest, is *Thomas Kyd*. We are entirely ignorant of the circumstances of his life even as to the year of his birth and that of his death. However, those works which are known with certainty to have proceeded from his pen prove that he had the education of a scholar, and also make it seem very likely that he was somewhat older than Lodge, Nash, Peele, Greene and Marlowe. The earliest of his writings, if indeed it is his, must be 'The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda,' which was printed in 1599.* The piece still bears a striking resemblance to the old Moral Plays and even thereby proves its relatively early origin. A 'chorus' consisting of the allegorical figures of Love, Happiness and Death, not only opens the play itself, but every separate act also, ends with a controversy in which all of the three personified powers boast of their deeds and triumphs over the others, till at the end of the fifth act, Death remains the victor, and the whole concludes with a eulogy on Queen Elizabeth, the only mortal whom Death does not venture to approach. This framework alone, shows the popular character of the piece; it is in fact a genuine, popular tragedy with a great deal of action, short speeches, rapid events, everything described in sketches, the development being left to the actors, devoid of a high ideal character, poor in thoughts, the comic parts coarse and low, and the tragic parts nothing but a great and general butchery, in which men are slaughtered like sheep, so that at the end, in the

* Reprinted in Hawkins, ii. 190-284.

literal sense of the word, not one of the persons survives. The blank verse is very free and irregular, perhaps it was only appended externally to the subject in a later remodelling. In all of these respects, even as regards the general style and character, it has some resemblance with the old 'Jeronimo,' except that it stands a degree lower. However the piece under the title of 'The First Part of Jeronimo, with the Warres of Portugal land the Life and Death of Don Andrea,' which was not printed till 1605,* is likewise not an authentic work of Kyd's. It is attributed to him—but with great probability—only because, to judge from the subject it evidently belongs to 'The Spanish Tragedy,' and has been regarded as the first part of it, both by Henslowe and by the printer. A. W. Schlegel is perfectly right in saying that both of these parts are full of absurdities, that the author had ventured upon describing the most forced situations and passions, without being aware of his want of power, that especially the catastrophe of the second part, which is intended to surpass every conceivable horror, is introduced in a trivial manner, merely producing a ludicrous effect, and that the whole was like a child's drawings, wholly unmindful of the laws of proportion, etc. But Schlegel has not merely forgotten to mention some other essential defects, but has especially omitted to state the merits of the piece. He is more particularly wrong, however, in treating 'Jeronimo' and 'The Spanish Tragedy' as one play. The two are no more closely allied than might be said of Shakspeare's 'Henry V.' and 'Henry IV.,' i. e., they are independent dramas, the second of which is by no means a continuation of the history of the first, but is merely outwardly connected with it by the subject, and perfectly intelligible without the former. On the other hand, 'Jeronimo,' as the title intimates, may be divided into two, or, if it be preferred, into three different parts, which are connected merely as regards time and locality, that is, externally; first, the history of the war between Portugal and Spain, in which the king of Portugal plays the principal part: secondly, the life and death of Don Andrea, the lover of the beautiful

* Reprinted in Dodsley, iii. 53-93.

Bellimperia, and thirdly, if it be desired, the deeds of Jeronimo from which the piece derives its name, although in reality he plays but a very subordinate part. The principal interest is decidedly centred in the story of the love of Don Andrea and Bellimperia; both are persecuted by Lorenzo, the brother of Bellimperia, who is jealous of Andrea's distinction and preferments. Yet the hero falls in battle, being killed, in a most unknightly fashion, by the followers of the Infanta of Portugal who have hurried up just as the latter has been victorious in a single combat. At his funeral, at the conclusion of the piece, his ghost suddenly appears for no reason but to exchange a friendly glance with his friend Horatio, Jeronimo's son. At the same time 'Revenge' and Charon also appear, the former to forbid Andrea's ghost from divulging the secrets of hell, the latter to accompany him back to the lower regions. This allegorical by-play is inserted so arbitrarily, so inappropriately and so unmeaningly, that it forms the best standpoint for judging the piece as regards its composition and poetical character.

In this respect its value is next to nothing. But as regards the delineation of character, the language and invention, it is not insignificant. The characters of Jeronimo, Horatio, Andrea, Prince Balthazar, Lorenzo, and Lanzaotto, although given in mere outlines with a few bold strokes, are drawn with decision and firmness. The language in its rough brevity has something striking, bold and energetic; the whole is full of life and animation, nay it is almost overflowing with action, so that for this very reason the development of the characters and the motives of the action cannot obtain their due importance. As little can the tragic pathos, emotion, passion, thought and reflection become sufficiently developed in the rapid flow of the dialogue. But the bombast of the vainglorious Spanish and Portuguese knights is all the broader. Yet everything has been done to gratify the dramatic taste and the desire for action in the early English public, and to secure for the play general approbation.

'The Spanish Tragedy, containing the Lamentable ende of Don Horatio and Bellimperia with the pittifull

Death of old Hieronimo,' printed in London in 1599,* has been attributed to Kyd, by the safe testimony of Th. Heywood in his 'Apology for Actors,' and by an attack in Ben Jonson's 'Cynthia's Revel' (1600) upon 'the *umbræ* or ghosts of some three or four plays departed a dozen years since' which have been again walking on the stage,† and it is probable that the piece had been upon the boards at least since the year 1558.‡ A second undoubted work of Kyd's is the rather free translation of a play by Robert Garnier, the best French dramatist of the sixteenth century, which was printed in 1595 under the title of 'Pompey the Great, his fair Cornelia's Tragedie: effected by her Father's and Husband's downe-cast Death and fortune, written in French by that excellent Poet, R. Garnier, and translated into English by Thomas Kyd.' § With the exception of these two pieces we possess nothing that can with certainty be ascribed to Kyd; it is a mere arbitrary conjecture that he is called the author of the old 'Taming of the Shrew' and of the old 'Hamlet.' From the first two pieces we can, in the meantime, only decide the question as to whether 'Jeronimo,' and 'Soliman and Perseda,' were written by him. As regards his 'Cornelia,' a piece which is constructed upon a misunderstood model of the ancients, it is altogether devoid of dramatic action, in reality merely lyrics and rhetoric in dialogue. The whole of the first act consists of one emphatic jeremiad by Cicero, about the desperate condition of Rome as it then was, its factitiousness, its servility, etc.,—a jeremiad which is continued at the end of the act by the chorus in rhymed stanzas. In this tone

* Reprinted, *l.c.*, iii. 99–202.

† *The Spanish Tragedy*, according to Henslowe's Diary, was again performed in 1588.

‡ A. Mézières therefore rejects historical facts, and errs in regard to the taste of the people when he (*l.c.*, p. 100 ff.) thinks that the development of tragedy and its elevation to the height attained by Marlowe and Shakspere, was occasioned by the so-called 'Burgher' tragedy which presented the public with tragical events from citizen life of the day, and in the immediate past. Plays, like *Arden of Feversham*, were no doubt not brought upon the stage till the people had seen enough of tragedies in the style of *Soliman*, *Hieronimo*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*.

§ Reprinted, *l.c.*, ii. 243–303.

it proceeds without a trace of action through the whole of the succeeding act, till maledictions and outbursts of grief on the part of Cornelia conclude the piece at the same point at which it had commenced. A great variety of inserted maxims, many not devoid of depth of thought, give occupation to the ghost; the language is noble and refined throughout, carried on in a flow of rhetoric at times genuinely poetical; the blank verse is interwoven with a number of rhymes, probably as a reminiscence of the rhymed Alexandrines of the original, but they are handled with skill and artistic tact.

That Kyd was able to translate such a work, nay, the fact that in its dedication to the Duchess of Sussex, he threatens to produce a second, similar work (a tragedy called 'Portia,' which, however, was never published) not only shows that he was a man of learned culture, but also that, at all events, he must have had a certain partiality for the antique tendency.

'The Spanish Tragedy' formed a diametrical contrast to 'Pompey the Great.' The former in its general style and character is as like 'Jeronimo,' as natural sisters could possibly be. In the first place it too is not wanting in absurdities, for the play opens and is connected with 'Jeronimo' by a conversation between Andrea's ghost and 'Revenge;' both remain continually on the stage as silent invisible spectators, in order, at the end of every act, to add a few words, in which Andrea laments over the delay in the revenge of his death upon the Infanta Balthazar, and Revenge admonishes him to be patient; at the end of the fifth act both return satisfied to the lower regions. Then Bellimperia suddenly falls in love with Horatio, who now steps into Andrea's place, and is persecuted by Lorenzo, at first without any cause whatever, and is finally assassinated. By some means which remain perfectly unexplained and incomprehensible, Lorenzo keeps old Jeronimo from the Court, so that he cannot bring forward his accusation against the murderers of his son. Jeronimo is consequently seized with madness, which, however, suddenly turns into a well-calculated and prudent action. The conclusion of the piece is a general massacre, in which Jeronimo, after having killed Lorenzo, bites off his own tongue, stabs the

Duke of Castile, and then himself with a penknife; all of which is done in the presence of the whole court and of the halberdiers. In spite of these absurdities the piece nevertheless has a hidden poetic power, from which one cannot quite escape. It is full of drastic animation, almost more so than 'Jeronimo,' but likewise too rich in action; the characters throughout are drawn powerfully and sharply, except that all are too much inclined to abandon themselves to their passions, even to senselessness. The representation of tragic pathos, although frequently exaggerated in some passages, nevertheless possesses a terrible effect, for instance where old Jeronimo and his wife express their grief over the loss of their noble, chivalrous son. Above all things, however, to an ordinary spectator the piece is throughout full of interest, captivating and affecting; not a moment is left empty, not a scene without internal movement.

This at once explains why no piece was more generally ridiculed by contemporary and younger poets, than 'The Spanish Tragedy,' and also why it nevertheless long remained a favourite play with the people, longer than 'Jeronimo,' so that even in 1602, Ben Jonson, in behalf of a revival of the piece, improved several passages, and added some scenes (which, however, were very superfluous, although written by a ready pen). In spite of its close internal resemblance to 'Jeronimo,' it still seems to me doubtful whether both pieces were composed by the same author. From together with the general similarity of style and character, there are considerable differences in the treatment. Kyd, as is proved from the above translation and 'The Spanish Tragedy,' was fond of long, exhaustive effusions of passion and emotion, his brush is broad and powerful, his colours deep and full, whereas the writer of 'Jeronimo' shows an inclination in the very opposite direction. 'The Spanish Tragedy' displays a higher and more learned culture: the persons frequently quote Latin verses, and even Italian phrases are occasionally thrown in; Olympus with all its gods, is, so to say, the third word in the mouths of all the speakers. Of all this there is no trace in 'Jeronimo.' As regards the composition, moreover, 'The Spanish Tragedy' is treated more drama-

tically, and is better rounded off; the love between Horatio and Bellimperia obviously forms the central point upon which everything turns, whereas 'Jeronimo' runs on in an epic succession and parallelism of events. The diction in 'Jeronimo' is tame and poor, short and sketchy, rapid and springing like a small waterfall; in 'The Spanish Tragedy,' on the other hand, it is rich and flowing like a broad and agitated stream; the blank verse, in the former is rugged, very free and irregular, in the latter, however, although somewhat monotonous, runs on regularly within its own limits, and is intermixed with a number of long passages in rhyme, which are more numerous and longer than in 'Jeronimo.' I am therefore inclined to believe that 'Jeronimo' was indeed originally written by Kyd, but that it was an older piece, and hence one written in prose, or in the old long-drawn, rhyming lines, which moreover—when, after 1586, blank verse through Marlowe's influence had become generally popular—was perhaps re-written in blank verse by some other younger poet. This may also have been the case with 'Soliman and Perseda;' for the power that blank verse must have exercised, soon after Marlowe introduced it upon the popular stage, is evident from the striking example of the already mentioned old play 'The Famous Victories of Henry V.' which was written in prose, but was printed in lines chopped up in the most arbitrary fashion, obviously only to give it the appearance of having been composed in blank verse.

In further proof of my opinion, I refer the reader to a second passage in Ben Jonson's Introduction to 'Cynthia's Revels,' where it is written: 'Another . . . swears down all that sit about him, that the old Hieronimo, as it was first acted, was the only best and judiciously penned play in Europe.*' These words have been referred to 'The Spanish Tragedy;' but the printed title, as well as that generally given to the piece was 'The Spanish Tragedie,' it is thus referred to in Heywood's 'Apology for Actors' and elsewhere. Besides this, according to Henslowe's 'Diary' (p. 201, 223), Ben Jonson in 1601 first made those

* *The Works of Ben Jonson.* By Barry Cornwall, London, 1838, p. 71.

improvements and additions to 'The Spanish Tragedy,' which are expressly mentioned on the title-page of the edition of 1602. Now as 'Cynthia's Revels' appeared as early as 1600, the words *as it was first acted*, cannot apply to these additions. Then, however, nothing remains but to refer them to 'Jeronimo,' and an earlier form of the same, and my hypothesis is naturally justified.

Thomas Lodge, the friend of G. Peele, Greene and Marlowe, but probably somewhat older than the two latter, studied (according to Wood) at Oxford about 1573, and appeared as an author and probably as a writer of plays, as early as 1580.* With the exception of some pamphlets and tales (among which his 'Rosalynde—Euphues Golden Legacy,' 1590, the source of Shakspeare's 'As You Like It'—is the most excellent), we possess only two of his plays: 'The Wounds of Civil War,' and the 'Looking Glass for London and England,' the latter of which was produced in conjunction with Robert Greene. What share he took in the latter cannot, of course, be decided; on the title page of the earliest print of 1594,† *Lodge* is named first, perhaps, therefore, the greater portion was his, and Greene merely his assistant. The play, which was acted by Henslowe's company in 1591, is, however, a weak production, nothing more than a series of loosely connected scenes representing the King of Nineveh, his wives and satraps, and the whole nation sunk in the deepest immorality. Some visitations from God,—a flash of lightning which kills the King's sister and his Queen, the lovely Remilia, and another which strikes his favourite, the miserable parasite Radagon—prove of no avail. Finally, in answer to the repeated requests of an angel, there appears in Nineveh the prophet Jonah (whose well known story is likewise interwoven), and he preaches repentance; thereupon all are converted, and the whole ends in general satisfaction by Jehovah descending in the form of an angel, and proclaiming mercy instead of justice. The Prophet Hosea is present during the whole performance (with the exception of the first act and the last scene) without taking any part in the play; he is a silent, invisible observer of the various

* In Doce's *l.c.*, viii. 3 f. Collier, *l.c.*, iii. 213 f.

† Reprinted in Dyce's edition of Greene's Dramatic Works, i. 59 ff.

characters, merely in order, at the end of every scene to address an exhortation—usually in rhyming lines—to the public, or rather to London and all England, showing them that the great nation of the West which is as deeply, and even more deeply degraded, should take an example from Nineveh (hence the title). The audience is dismissed with a similar exhortation from the mouth of the Prophet Jonah.

This play has been considered a kind of satire or ironical defence of the Puritanical attacks upon the theatre, and no doubt is a piece with a tendency. Yet, in spite of careful investigations, I have not been able to discover any irony and satire; hence, I believe that it was written with the same object as Peele's 'David and Bethsabe,' i.e., to stop the mouths of those zealots, who continually maintained that nothing but secular, unholy things, injurious to religion and morality, were brought upon the stage, and that the drama had completely forgotten the original object which it had in view at the time of the Mysteries and Moral Plays. The piece is therefore interesting in so far, as it shows in what manner poets, like Lodge and Greene, endeavoured to combine the nature and object of the old Moralities with the demands of the then existing state of art. It is, as it were, both a Moral and a Miracle Play in the spirit of the age of Greene and Marlowe, but just thereby a striking proof that the old Moralities and Mysteries could not be revived in this manner, i.e., with the express tendency of moral and religious instruction. The attempt could not but fail, because it contradicted both the general spirit of the national culture, and more especially the course and the object of the development of dramatic art in England.

'The Wounds of Civil War; Lively sette forth in the true Tragedies of Marius and Scilla, Written by Thomas Lodge,' (London, 1594),* first shows us the dramatist in his true and natural character. Collier conjectures that the play must have appeared soon after Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine' as the greater part of it is indeed written in blank verse, but still profusely interspersed with long passages in rhyme and also rhyming couplets, and as the third act

* Reprinted in Dodsley, *L.c.*, pp. 11-88.

contains a scene (where Sulla returns as victor over Mithridates) which is evidently intended to be an imitation of, and to surpass a similar scene in 'Tamburlaine.' And in fact granting Marlowe's greater independence and originality—it can scarcely be doubted that Lodge in this case did take his friend's style as his model. In general he is inferior to Marlowe in poetical power, Marlowe evidently possesses the greater dramatic talent. In many respects, however, Lodge surpasses him; in the first place his style is less infected by Marlowe's inclination to pomposity of speech and action, without, however—like Greene's diction—as frequently, so to speak, ending in smoke. He shows himself to be free of that immoderate pathos which constantly drowns itself by its own voice, and of that striving of Kyd's and Marlowe's, forcibly to raise the effect of the drama to an unnatural height by means of violent actions, unheard-of situations and exaggerated outbursts of passion. Nay, in him we first meet with a foreboding of that elevating, conciliatory element in the conception of the tragic which surrounds Shakspeare's tragedies with an irresistible charm.

In order to give this element its proper force, Lodge seems to have found himself obliged to remodel the historical subject so completely, that his drama can scarcely be called historical. These deviations from history can, however, only partially be called happy. In Lodge, Marius—from the very commencement, more humane, nobler and more generous—concludes the course of his actions, not as in history with a five days' butchery of his opponents, but with a generous act of self-control, by releasing the imprisoned wife and sister of Sulla, and sending them to meet his approaching deadly enemy. He dies soon after, called away by seven eagles flying round his head, that is to say, by as many messengers from the gods, in place of, as in history, being driven by pangs of conscience into the vice of drinking, and of perishing thereby. This deviation is one of the happy ones, for it was dramatically necessary that the two heroes of the piece should be placed in distinct contrast to each other, and also it is in reality unimportant, for his severe pangs of conscience prove that Marius was, in truth, better than

his bloody deeds which were the promptings of the moment. As a contrast to him, the poet has described Sulla throughout the play as an ambitious, revengeful, hard-hearted character, thirsting only for despotic power; and, with keen psychological insight, and a remarkable talent for describing characters, the historical material has been worked out into the picture of a complete and living personality which, by the peculiar feature of a spirited, cutting sarcasm (with which Sulla sends his victim to death), receives something extremely characteristic and piquant. But suddenly all the colours and features of the picture become changed, and Sulla falls, not only out of his historical part, but also out of his dramatic character; for at the conclusion, when at the height of his acquired power and greatness, upon hearing of the courageous death of the younger Marius, and is thus rid of his last enemy, he suddenly begins to make reflections on the vanity of earthly happiness, renounces his rank and retires into private life. After a short intermediate scene—in which, with equanimity he bears the insults of two common, half-witted citizens, thereby preserving the seriousness of his conversion—a genius appears, telling him, in Latin verses, of his approaching death; whereupon, with sublime words of consolation to his wife and daughter, Sulla dies, ‘like the Arabian phoenix, with his eyes upon the sun.’ It is obvious that Lodge’s object was to give the whole an elevating, conciliatory conclusion; however this conclusion does not only give no satisfaction to poetical justice, but the poet, by making both heroes perfectly equal in their death, at the same time destroys the internal unity of his drama. It has now, in reality, become two dramas, as indeed the title intimates; the two are merely externally allied, the one representing the life and death of Marius, the other the fortunate fate of Sulla, who is favoured by the gods even in death. The piece becomes a mere glorification of blind fortune, of the arbitrary favour of the gods, and this seems finally to be the expressed fundamental idea of the play, which, unmotivated and contradictory as it is here developed, is not only undramatical, but also unpoetical.

Although, accordingly, Lodge’s attempt in this definite

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fundamental thought—to rivet the loose connection of his poem by an ideal unity, and thereby to obtain a more perfect form—completely failed, and although his attempt to give the tragic element a higher significance was scarcely half successful, yet it is this very attempt which makes his work highly interesting, and it is therefore to be regretted that we do not possess any more of his dramatic works. We may, however, console ourselves with the conjecture that, as no other of his plays seems to have been printed, it is extremely probable that this is by far the best of all his dramas.

CHAPTER X.

THOMAS NASH AND GEORGE PEELE.

ACCORDING to Greene's opinion, that is, supposing the farewell words addressed to his colleagues at the end of his 'Groatsworth of Wit,' are meant to refer to Lodge under the name of Young Juvenal—Lodge seems to have had a special talent for satirical and cutting wit; his other pieces were therefore, perhaps comedies. Yet Meres, in his 'Palladis Tamia,' does not mention him among the distinguished comic writers of his day; among the first mentioned of these, however, we do find the name of the well-known pamphletist *Thomas Nash*. And yet even of him and the circumstances of his life, we know nothing further than that he was born in Leostoffe, in Suffolk, probably about the year 1564, and that he was already in his grave in 1601. He in so far shares the same fate as Lodge, as we possess of his dramatic works only one piece that was written entirely by himself, ('Dido Queen of Carthage,' which he wrote in conjunction with Marlowe and is probably for the most part the work of the latter), whereas there exist numerous specimens of his pamphlets and controversial treatises. In the latter, we everywhere find the skilful writer, the keen satirist, but more especially the terrible disputant in single combat, which he proved himself, for instance in his literary contest with Gabriel Harvey; we find a penetrating mind, which knows at the first glance how to attack the weak points of his enemy: a ready wit, more cutting than comic, which explains how it was that one of his lost dramas, 'The Isle of Dogs,' could lead to his being imprisoned; we find also acute remarks and elegance of style, but no depth of feeling, no greatness of mind, no productiveness and a want of an ideal character.

The same merits and defects are manifested in the

dramatic work of which we have already spoken, entitled 'A pleasant Comedie, called Summer's last Will and Testament, Written by Thomas Nash (London 1600);' * to judge from some allusions to the events of the time it must have been written in the autumn of 1592. Did we not know from other quarters that the author was a man of learned culture, who had studied at Cambridge and taken his degree of B.A. in 1585, almost every page of this drama alone would be sufficient to prove the fact. The piece is a mere allegory in which all possible gods and mythological figures take a part; it is profusely furbished up with classical erudition, Latin quotations, and learned allusions, but like every mere allegory is a cold, dry, and wearisome production. Summer "the king of the world," but weak and decrepid, and led by Autumn and Winter, wishes to make his will, but first summons all the servants, officials and princes of his kingdom (Ver, Solstitium, Sol, Orion, Bacchus, etc.), in order to take them to account. This is—as everyone must see—in itself a very undramatic subject, and upon it the dramatic form is enforced against its very nature. But, making allowance for this ill-chosen subject and overlooking the defects resulting from it, we must acknowledge that the whole possesses much wit and ingenuity, and that everything possible is done to breathe life and interest into the subject. To effect this, Nash at the very beginning makes the ghost of Will Summer, the famous court-jester of Henry VIII., appear as the prologue, and, in a most amusing manner, forget his own character by suddenly acting that of Mr. Toy (the name of the actor who plays the part), and as suddenly again changing into the person of Will Summer. The whole part is carried on in this twilight between illusion and reality; and, as Will Summer at the conclusion of the introductory scene announces with a clever turn of speech, that he intends remaining on the stage to witness the play, and as in fact he not only remains, but, by means of interspersed remarks, continually criticises and ridicules the play, the poet, and the actors, and as, at the end, the play again begins with Will Summer first personifying Mr. Toy and then the court-jester of Henry VIII., the whole

* Reprinted in Dodsley, *L.c.*, ix. 13-79.

piece appears enveloped in the same wavering light, and the drama becomes a mere dramatical joke. This form, by which the allegory is rendered tolerable, but at the same time destroyed, makes the play somewhat interesting. It proves, not only that the poets already actually possessed the positive consciousness that the allegory in itself was dramatically impossible, and hence compatible only with a self-destruction of the dramatic illusion, but also shows that this mode of treating art ironically—which the romantic school declared to be the highest perfection of poetry—was attempted, in the domain of comedy at least, 200 years before them, and was therefore not even a new invention. It however likewise proves that Nash certainly was a scholar and possessed a refined, ingenious and humorous mind, but that he was neither a poet nor a dramatist, for although capable of producing an intellectual play, he was not capable of creating a drama.

I have placed Nash and Lodge before *George Peele* (although the former certainly and the latter probably is somewhat younger), so as, in my discussion to place the three representatives of the pre-Shakspearian dramas nearer to one another. There can be no doubt that, after Greene and Marlowe, Peele was the most distinguished talent among those dramatists who prepared the way for Shakspeare. Greene in his 'Groatsworth of Wit,' mentions him, perhaps with a certain partiality, as a poet in no respect inferior to, and in many respects "rarer" than Marlowe and Lodge; Nash (1588) calls him "*primus verborum artifex*;" and Meres (*l.c.*) mentions him, after Marlowe before Kyd and Shakspeare, as one of the best tragic writers of his time. According to recently discovered documents, Peele was of good family, born in 1558, not in Devonshire, but probably in London, studied at Oxford, where he resided for nine years, and in 1577 took his degree of B.A., that of M.A. in 1579 and returned to London in 1583. Here he lived in friendly intercourse with Greene, Marlowe, Lodge, Nash, and others, probably earning his living by his pen. Although married at the age of twenty-five, he lived in that dissolute and licentious manner which, as it seems, was the fashion with the so-called authors by profession of the day; sometimes starving in misery, some-

times, when a lucky chance filled his purse, in revelry and riot. The pamphlet entitled 'The Merry Conceited jests of G. Peele,' which was not published till after his death, represents him as a low and common swindler, but, apart from some single features, this is doubtless a complete falsehood or fiction, and employs his popular name merely as a signboard for favour with the public. Peele's moral character however, as Greene intimates, was so far from being spotless, that it was quite possible to circulate such fictions about him. According to Meres he was already in his grave in 1598.*

Peele's earliest yet known literary productions, are some commendatory verses to Watson's 'Hecatompethia,' a collection of sonnets printed in 1582. Others of his poetical works which likewise fall to the time of his sojourn in Oxford, especially a translation of the 'Iphigenia' of Euripides, have been lost.† His earliest drama—supposed to be his first from a remark by Nash on Greene's 'Menaphon'—is the 'Arraignment of Paris,' which was printed without his name in 1584.‡ However, if 'The History of the two valiant Knights, Syr Clyomon, Knight of the Golden Sheeld, sonne of the King of Denmark, and Syr Clamydes the White Knight, etc.' (London, 1599) § is really from his pen—as Dyce seems to think it necessary to suppose, because in one of the copies of the old edition in the style of writing at the time, Peele is called the author—then this play must at all events be older than the 'Arraignment of Paris.' But I am inclined to believe that, although in style it is closely allied to Peele's oldest plays, it may not have been written by him, but by one of his immediate predecessors from the seventh decade. At all events it stands upon a lower stage of dramatic culture than the 'Arraignment of Paris.' The language is older and more disjointed, the verse is that of the rhymed

* See, *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Robert Greene and George Peele, with Memoirs of the Authors and Notes*, by the Rev. Alexander Dyce. London, 1861, p. 323 ff. My having—in the above statements in regard to the circumstances of Peele's life—exclusively followed the recently discovered document, according to which Peele, as a sworn witness in a law-suit, made those statements himself, is justified by the public and judicial character of the document.

† Dyce, *l.c.* 324.

‡ Dyce, p. 333.

§ Dyce, p. 487-535.

Alexandrine of fourteen syllables (except that it is more freely handled) which was the prevailing verse in the popular theatre before the introduction of blank verse; the diction is broad and clumsy, the dialogue wholly devoid of all dialectical skill. The subject is an indifferent chivalrous romance, with dragons and sorcerers, wandering knights and lost princesses, more of a dialogued narrative than a drama; with long speeches, which frequently give a repetition of what the spectator has just seen, it is, in fact, full of incidents, but without any real action; there is still no trace of dramatic finish and scenic arrangement, and the characters are described in a very general manner, still without individual colouring. Lastly, it also frequently resembles the Moralities: the fool or clown is called 'Subtle Shift,' and, as such, is more expressly characterised by the epithet of 'Vice;' two allegorical figures, Rumour and Providence, are suddenly introduced into the action, the former in order to report to Clyomon, the hero, what has happened during his absence, the latter in order to take an active part, and to withhold Clyomon's beloved Neromis, from committing a rash and unnecessary suicide; nay, the clown of the play once expressly calls it a 'pageant,' a proof that it must have been written when this word was still the usual and general term applied to the various species of dramas. If nevertheless the piece is attributed to Peele, it would have to be supposed that it was an early youthful production, that he wrote it at Oxford, long before his return to London, and that subsequently he handed it over to a company of actors. However, this expedient also I consider to be inadmissible, because in my opinion, to judge from its spirit and character, the play does not seem to have been written by an immature youth.

Peele's 'Arraignment of Paris,' which calls itself 'a Pastorall, presented before the Queene's Majestic by the Children of her Chapell,'* is a court drama in the style of Lilly, that is, no free composition, but intended to be an exhibition to delight and flatter the Queen; hence it is poor in action, but all the richer in gallant phrases, furnished up with songs (among which is one in Italian) and all kinds of love scenes between shepherds and shep-

* Dyce, *l.c.*, 347-71.

herdresses, nymphs and the terrestrial gods of Mount Ida; these are inappropriately and externally appended to the subject. The play is interesting only as regards language and versification.* It is merely when contrasted to the prevailing "euphuism" that the diction throughout appears free and natural, suitable and fluent, not without grace and harmony in sound and rhyme, but also, when compared with the earlier dramatic attempts, much more adroit and more poetical. We must therefore assume that Peele was the first to oppose Lilly's affected, artificial mode of expression, and to make the attempt of accustoming the ears of the Court to the true language of poetry and to a poetically elevated style. It is chiefly for this reason that Nash praises him as *primus verborum artifex*. In the style of verse we indeed meet with the Alexandrines, but in such a manner that the long fourteen syllabic line alternates with the shorter ten syllabic, and that the latter predominates. These ten-syllabic Alexandrines Peele treats so freely (by often completely omitting the cæsura) that at first sight they might be taken for rhymed blank verse. As he no doubt may have done this in some of his earlier plays, none of which, unfortunately, have been preserved, his diction may have formed, as it were, the bridge by which Marlowe proceeded on his great undertaking of introducing blank verse on to the popular stage.

Of Peele's other works, which first show us the poet in his true colours, I consider 'The Old Wife's Tale, a pleasant conceited Comedie,' (London 1595.)† to be his earliest, and after 'David and Bethsabe,' his best work.

* The principal points are, that Paris is accused by Juno and Pallas before the assembled gods for having pronounced an unjust sentence; he is released without punishment, but as his fair complainants persist in their appeal and, as it were, annul his sentence, the lawsuit is recommenced and the decision left in the hands of Diana, who then awards the fatal apple, not to any of the three goddesses but to the wise nymph Eliza, who is as chaste as she is beautiful and powerful. Juno, Pallas, and Venus of course agree to this decision and lay all their gifts at the feet of the Queen; nay, at the end even the three Fates put in an appearance in order, in a Latin chant, to deliver up the emblems of their power, and therewith the power itself to the exalted nymph.

† Dyce, p. 441-59.

It is a dramatised old wife's tale narrated to three erring fancies—Frolic, Antic and Fantastic; she has, however, scarcely commenced with a kind of explanation, when the story itself begins to be incorporated, and to pass over into action before the eyes of the listeners. The whole action is treated quite in the style of a fairy tale, always wavering in the peculiar twilight between dreaming and waking, between profound sense and nonsense, between childish play and matured humour, but always pointing symbolically to the main point of the story, to pure goodness of heart, and that unpretentious and unconscious virtue whose reward falls into its own hands; whereas clever intention, boastful gallantry, blind foolishness, nay, even devoted love between brothers and sisters, trusting too much to its own power, exert themselves in vain. This ingenious poetic thought animates and connects the confused number of scenes, in which appear successively, two brothers, who have lost their sisters, then a proud, insolent giant, accompanied by an enamoured fool, the former swaggering about with his double-edged sword, the latter pouring forth his sentimentalities, lastly, a knight errant, who is devoting his whole fortune to pay the hard-hearted sexton for the burial of a poor man; they are now all on their way to find respectively the lovely princess, the sisters and the beloved lady and to liberate them from the hands of an old sorcerer. None of them succeed in their project, except the knight errant, and he only with the help of the ghost of the poor Jack whose body he caused to be buried. The whole play—which is written in prose, and with only occasional passages in blank verse, which are perhaps later remodellings—in contrast to the 'Arraignment of Paris,' and 'Sir Clyomon and Clamydes,' has only the one fault of being too sketchy and passing by too quickly like shadows on a wall.

This dry and sketchy brevity which leaves the skeleton of the drama, the action, shorn and bare without flesh and blood, without any detail in the development, scarcely permitting emotion and passion, sentiment and reflection to express themselves in words—was the opposite fault into which the popular drama fell, before the time of

Marlowe, after having rid itself of the long pulpit orations of the Moralities, and the equally long controversies of Heywood's Interludes. But poets became so conscious that action was the soul of the drama, and the public was so much pleased with the innovation and attached so much importance to it, that the consideration of all the other dramatic elements was absorbed in this. We meet with this one-sidedness not merely in old 'Jeronimo,' in 'Soliman and Perseda,' but also in all of Peele's works (with the exception of 'David and Bethsabe'), and again in some of R. Greene's dramas. Thus 'The Battel of Alcazar fought in Barbarie, etc.' (London 1594),* is a mere battle-piece and was published soon after Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine' (1586), and worked from this model. That it is one of Peele's earlier works is proved by the old Dumb Shows being still retained; these are explained by the "presenter," and are no mere additions, but carry on the action by showing what has happened before and between the separate acts. Besides this, 'Tamburlaine' is once expressly mentioned in a conspicuous manner and with reference to a line in Marlowe's tragedy; diction and versification, especially the frequently occurring bombast, reminds one of Marlowe's yet unheard language. The perpetual fighting and noise of battles, of which the action almost exclusively consists, makes the piece as monotonous as Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine;' except that we miss Marlowe's rhetoric of passion, Marlowe's pathos, Marlowe's wealth of expression and the powerful colouring which is thence spread over all his personages. Peele's characters are, it is true, correctly drawn, but are flat and dry, one and all are mere proud, imperious knights, or revengeful Mahomedans. And as the action is likewise devoid of variety, and turns but slowly and heavily upon the uninteresting fact of the dethronement of the usurper, Muly Mahomet, and the vain attempt of king Sebastian of Portugal to reinstall him, it is obvious that the piece is nothing but a popular drama, written hurriedly without any higher poetical object than of satisfying the love of the spectacular in the multitude.

Better, richer, and more carefully worked out, is 'The

* Dyce, p. 417-441.

Famous Chronikle of Edward the first, etc.' (London 1593);* it is a pity, however, that in the form we now have it, it is probably only made up from the different parts played by the actors, and is in such a condition that it is almost impossible to form a safe opinion in regard to it. But this much is clear, that the play which is written entirely in the style of the old chronicles, is, as it were, merely a dramatised chronicle of the life of Edward I. Of Shakspeare's profound historical tact, of his political wisdom, of his divinatorial knowledge of worldly occurrences, of his description of general conditions and relations, we have here still less than in Lodge's 'Wounds of Civil War.' The events pass by in epic breadth, in one straight, continuous line, and in chronological order. The dramatic personages are characterised almost solely by their actions, which follow rapidly one upon the other; the language, that is, the representation of their thoughts, dispositions and passions, is again a mere sketch. Nay, this sketch occasionally contradicts their actions. Queen Eleanor, for instance, up to the moment when she kills the Lady Mayoress for the sake of her rich dresses, and on her death-bed confesses to have committed a double adultery, makes the impression, it is true, of being obstinate, haughty and despotic, but still of having a noble nature. The curious scene in which the Queen perjures herself, by denying that she was the cause of the death of the unfortunate Lady Mayoress, and calls upon Heaven to let her sink into the depths of the earth, if she had spoken an untruth, and in which thereupon the earth, amidst thunder and lightning, does actually open in order to engulf her, and to spit her out again in another part of London—is one of those popular features which Peele took from Holinshed's chronicle or from an old ballad (which is still extant). In our day this would be called a clumsy sensational scene, but in those times, even though awkward and childish, it was the expression of that poetical faith in a higher guidance of earthly things, without which history could not be dramatised, the same faith as is expressed in the downfall of Llewellen and of his brother David—whom Peele represents as martyrs to Welsh heroism—and

* Dyce, p. 377-416.

in the fate of Edward I. himself, but in a different manner. This general romantico-poetical atmosphere which pervades the play, and envelopes the multitude of actions and events in the picturesque haze of distance, again forms the chief merit of the piece.

'The Love of King David and Fair Pethsabe,' etc. (London 1599),* is doubtless Peele's maturest and best work. In my opinion, however, it does not belong to our consideration here, inasmuch as I am convinced it was not written till Shakspeare's 'Romeo and Juliet,' was already upon the boards (1591-92). I believe that, as regards style and language, there are distinct traces of Shakspeare's influence. It is more especially the love scenes and the images and similes describing the charms of the beauty of nature, that remind one of those incomparable pictures in 'Romeo and Juliet.' The poetical description of love, beauty and grace, of which in Peele's other pieces there are scarcely any feeble attempts, he has here depicted with a remarkably high degree of success. In accordance with the subject the play has something of the peculiar Oriental-Judæic character, (distinctly apparent in the 'Song of Solomon,') that confused and glaring splendour of colouring, that dazzling sunshine, that animating, prolific warmth, which will allow of no settled form, but in which the outlines, while endeavouring to draw the form, as it were, vanish again into infinitude. On the other hand, when the situation demands the expression of greatness or sublimity, Peele, here also, in most cases falls into bombast; the representation of power, emotion, rapid effect and stirring passion, is in fact not his strong point. Otherwise the treatment is in general the same as in 'The famous Chronicle of Edward I.' The subject is taken almost without alteration from the Old Testament, and arranged in an epic and chronological manner. But the whole is more rounded off, because the incidents are not so numerous, and seem to be borne by an internal ideal connection. We here have the fundamental idea of Judæic morals, the transmission of punishment from the parents upon the children, forming the basis of the whole representation. David, by yielding to his adulterous

* Dyce, p. 450-487.

passion for Bethsabe, becomes for her sake, indirectly at least, the murderer of Uriah; burdened with this crime David, so to say, calls the vice of sensuality and thus family feud, into his house; his son Amnon ravishes his own sister; Absalom, quick and violent in his actions, kills his own brother in expiation of the foul deed and rebels against his father. Yet Peele had no distinct consciousness of this ideal unity, otherwise he would have brought Absalom's rebellion and fall into casual connection with the story of David and Bethsabe, and with Amnon's sin, and not, as he has done, merely connected the two actions externally, so that in reality a new piece begins with Absalom's rebellion.

The characters of David, Absalom, Bethsabe, Joab and Uriah are well contrasted and appropriately drawn throughout, but still too much by their mere actions. David, however, forms an exception, and lets us look into his soul, which is often troubled by passion, pain, remorse, paternal love, anger and indignation. The blank verse, which is but rarely mixed with occasional rhymes, and alternates with prose, appears already to be treated with great adroitness, whereas in 'The famous Chronicle of Edward I.' and in 'The Battle of Alcazar,' it is still somewhat awkward and monotonous, and is interrupted by whole scenes in rhyming lines.

CHAPTER XI.

ROBERT GREENE.

ROBERT GREENE, as I believe, has judged Peele's capabilities with a certain degree of partiality; if this is the case, he was probably induced to do so not merely on account of being his friend and associate, but also by reason of the great resemblance of mind, and the unusual equality of temperament and similarity in manner of life, which seems to have subsisted between them. The date of Greene's birth cannot be precisely determined, but there can be no doubt of its falling between 1550 and 1560.* He was descended from a family in Norwich, studied at Cambridge, received there in 1578 the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and soon afterwards made a rather long tour through Italy and Spain. During these travels—as he himself confesses in his 'Repentance'—he abandoned himself to the wildest excesses in the company of vagabonds, adventurers and low persons of all kinds, which weakened him both bodily and mentally, and robbed his undecided character of whatever energy and self-control, of steadiness and application it may have possessed, and which we miss in his works. He was never able to control himself, to concentrate his powers, or to mould his volatile nature into any definite form. Upon his return home in 1583 he obtained at Cambridge the higher degree of M.A. Immediately after this he proceeded to the metropolis, and here again, as he himself confesses, led a merry and dissolute life. That the Robertus Greene who (according to an ancient document), as Rector of Walkington, was presented by the Queen to the Chapter of the Diocese of York as early as

* When A. Dyce (in his edition of *Greene's and Peele's Works*, p. 1), says that the year of his birth falls in 1550, this, in my opinion, is too early a date. For it is not likely that Greene obtained his degree of B.A. at the age of twenty-eight, or that he should have studied so late or so long at Cambridge. Very probably he was not much older than Peele, and did not appear as an author till after him.

1576—is not our poet there can, in my opinion, be no doubt.* On the other hand, it is possible that in 1584, he may have accepted a clergyman's place in Essex. However, even this report is founded merely upon an incidental remark made by O. Gilchrist, for which he gives no authority, and upon a note in the style of the sixteenth century, which exists in one of the copies of the earliest edition of 'The Pinner of Wakefield' (1599). Greene, in the title page of his 'Planetomachia,' a treatise published in 1585, calls himself a 'student of Phisicke,' hence he gives himself this name scarcely a year after he is said to have been made Vicar of Tollesbury.† He would consequently very soon have had to give up that position, and probably also the study of medicine, owing to his inveterate delight in a free adventurous life, which no doubt also led him to theatrical pursuits and to dramatic poetry. If he ever was Vicar of Tollesbury, he entered the clerical profession perhaps out of love for some pretty, amiable girl whom he married and then retired to the country to spend some time in peaceful happiness. But from his 'Never too Late,' a tale published in 1590, and his 'Groatsworth of Wit, etc.' (1592), where he describes his own life (in the former in the person of Francesco, in the latter as Roberto—except that as Dyce justly remarks, it is difficult to see how much is to be taken for fact, and how much for poetical invention), we are led to infer with certainty that he did not long continue in this peace and quietude.‡ His wife may perhaps have wearied him with her moralising and economising; a business journey to London and the lewd arts of a courtesan may have aroused his passions; in short, he, as it seems, very soon sent his wife and child to Lincolnshire, and between 1585–86 was

* Dyce (*l.c.*, p. 3) is of a different opinion, and refers his readers to this document as a proof that Greene entered the Church. However, he forgets that Greene was not a Bachelor of Arts till 1578, hence was no doubt studying at Cambridge in 1576, and that the Queen expressly calls the Robertus Greene of the document, a chaplain of her Royal Chapel, hence that the poet Greene must have been a clergyman and have lived in London *before* 1576. It also cannot be made to agree that the same Greene who, as early as 1575 was made *Rector* of Walkington, should seven years subsequently be appointed *Vicar* of Tollesbury in Essex.

† Dyce, p. 4. 77.

‡ Dyce, p. 23.

again in London. He was fond of playing the part of a scholar, and this is probably the reason why he did not rest satisfied with his Cambridge degree he desired the same honour from the university of Oxford, which he obtained in 1588. After this, for four successive years he led a life of wild excess, at one time living in the greatest luxury, and at another in the most abject poverty; at one time lashing himself with bitter reproaches of repentance and self-contempt, then again pouring forth his easily excited fancy and feelings in poetical creations. Such was his life till 1592, in which year on the 2nd of September, he died in sincere repentance, forsaken and alone, in consequence of a disease contracted by his own irregular life.*

Greene was a prolific and versatile author, at least after the year 1583, when he published his earliest known work.† In addition to his dramas he composed a number of tales and poems, didactic, edifying and moral treatises, generally in a semi-poetical, often romantic form; also some pamphlets of a satirical character. Dyce‡ counts no less than thirty-four small prose writings of this description. Of dramas there are, it is true, only six, and if 'The Looking-glass of London' is omitted, only five that can be attributed to him with certainty; but it is probable that a number of his earliest pieces (those written between 1585-88) are lost. In all he displays no common powers of mind, tenderness of feeling, a quick and lively fancy, a facility and a cleverness of thought and expression; in this he is superior to his friend Peele, but in the want of profundity of mind, of depth and solidity of feeling, of power and decision of character, as well as of moral earnestness, and of that energy of thought which, with a strong hand, controls the reins both of life and of poetry, he is completely his equal. Therefore although he, in his dramas, occasionally strove to connect the multifarious threads of the action in its actual depth, that is, below the

* Dyce, p. 55 f.—Bodenstedt (*l.c.*, p. 59) considers the stories and sentences passed upon his dissolute mode of life as exaggerated, and also doubts the genuineness of the two pamphlets which did not appear till after his death, viz., *The Repentance of R. Greene* and his *Groatsworth of Wit*, etc.—As regards the latter, I think his doubts are unjust.

† Dyce, p. 25-76.

‡ Dyce, p. 76 ff.

outward representation, he was never successful, it was beyond his power to adhere throughout to any one idea of life as the foundation and substance of the whole piece, and to carry it through all the different parts with equal clearness. His details, as in the case of Peele, are but loosely and externally connected, all is diffuse, and this inward tendency to dissolution can only be arbitrarily checked by sudden turns of the action which are not accounted for in any way. His dramas possess form and proportion, they possess emotion, poetical thought and a light and graceful movement; but this external form does not compensate for the want of internal unity and the organic arrangement of the various parts. In agreement with this his dramatic characters are perfectly similar to most of Peele's personages, correctly drawn, it is true, and not wanting in freshness and animation, but devoid of an inner motive of development; they are, as it were, ready at the beginning of the piece, not full and round figures, but for the most part, so to say, sculptured in half-relief, like figures in ancient illuminations, which cannot divest themselves of the brilliant ground work of gold upon which they are emblazoned. They are deficient in intrinsic genuineness of character and intensity of feeling; like Greene himself, their life does not so much pass outwards from within, but conversely; and hence their inmost and actual character is never revealed, but reality and appearance float on in a loose, broad and wavering uncertainty. The language is pure, clear, and graceful, but without ebb and flow, and runs on in too calm and uniform a manner; it is not, so much the language of feeling which springs from the depth of the soul, as conversation and narrative which receive the subject from without; grandeur and power, the pathos of emotion, and the storm of passion are as much beyond Greene's power of description as beyond Peele's.

Thus composition, characterisation and language accord with one another, and Tieck justly praises a certain soothing harmony in Greene's poetry. It is in fact harmonious by being cast in one mould and in one spirit; all the characters breathe the same atmosphere, and we can trace the same treatment of drawing, colouring, and perspective throughout the whole piece. But, to use a pre-

vious illustration, it is with them as with the ancient illuminations—all the figures are painted in one style and in one spirit, but the intrinsic necessity of their connection which ought to be directly apparent, is wanting. For instance, in the ancient picture, by the side of the Saviour, the Apostles and the Virgin, we have a later saint, a bishop, a pope, or even the donor of the picture and his family. The harmony of Greene's works does not arise out of *one* thoroughly developed idea of life forming the basis of the whole, but out of the unity of *feeling* and of the *general* tone of mind, in which the several parts are conceived and executed. In short, Greene treats dramatic art too much in the *epic* style, with him the *inner* life is kept too much in the background, the action develops too little out of the subjective mind and character of the dramatic personages, and hence, that which takes place, appears more in the light of an event than of an action. This is the fundamental error which is the root of all the defects of both Peele's and Greene's dramas.

For this reason Greene has been more successful with those of his works where his subject is legendary, more epic than dramatic. His 'James IV. of Scotland,' when regarded as an *historical* drama, is considerably inferior to his 'King Alphonsus of Aragon,' or his 'Orlando Furioso,' and especially his 'Friar Bacon,' which were popular works, and long maintained their place on the stage. It is evident from 'The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth, slaine at Flodden, intermisted with a pleasant Comedie,' etc. (London, 1598)* that Greene, led astray perhaps by Marlowe, ventured upon a task quite beyond him. He as yet obviously had no idea of the dignity of history, of an historico-political spirit, of an historical conception of the subject, or of an historico-dramatical form of the drama. History with him resolves itself into a romance, which turns upon James IV. falling in love with the beautiful Ida, daughter of the Countess of Arran, and upon the faithful love of the Queen for her faithless consort. Love conquers in the end, for James being persistently rejected by the virtuous Ida, regrets the blind haste in which, deceived and betrayed by a miserable flatterer,

* In Dyce, p. 183-220.

he gave orders for the assassination of his Queen; she, fortunately, has only been seriously wounded, and when scarcely recovered, throws herself between the contending armies of the Scotch and English. Her entreaties conciliate her father the King of England, who, in order to avenge her supposed death, has invaded Scotland; thus she, as it were, takes the heart of her husband by storm. This romantic story, of which hitherto no trace has been found either in the Scotch chronicles or elsewhere,* is enclosed in a fantastic framework, the chief figures of which are: Oberon, 'King of Fairies,' and Bohan, a Scottish misanthropic recluse. Bohan is supposed to have the 'history' enacted before his friend Oberon, in justification of his having separated himself from the world. This is the 'pleasant comedie' mentioned on the title page, and is an additional *bonne bouche* to delight the popular love for pageants and the laughable; it is connected with the play by the well sustained character of Slipper, the son of Bohan, who however, also plays the part of clown. The atmosphere of history was evidently too pure and cool for Greene's taste, and he accordingly tries to mix it with the fragrance and haziness of romance.

However, in his 'King Alphonsus,' and still more so in his 'Orlando Furioso,' we feel throughout that the poet is at home with his subject; the reader is met by a refreshing breath of native air. 'The Comical Historie of Alphonsus, King of Aragon' (London, 1599),† is indeed based upon a semi-historical foundation (at least it is probable that Greene in his 'Alphonsus' thought of Alphonsus V., King of Aragon, 1416-58); and yet he has erected such a romantic and fantastic structure upon this foundation, that it would be doing him an injustice to judge his work from the standpoint of an historical drama. The play is obviously an imitation of Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine'; like the latter, Alphonsus, supported merely by his heroism and his knightly sword, not only conquers the crown of Aragon, which was wrongfully taken from his father, and is his rightful inheritance, but half the world into the bargain. The perpetual noise of battle, through which the hero advances from victory to victory, produces,

* Dyce, p. 33.

† Dyce, p. 221-248.

as in the case of 'Tamburlaine,' a certain monotony which is not broken either by the introduction of the oracular ghost of Mahomet (who, one knows not why, being enraged with Amurack will at first give no oracle, and finally, at the entreaties of his priests who are anxious about their own existence, gives a wrong oracle out of spite—one of those strange and unaccounted-for incidents, with which Greene delights to embellish his plays), nor by the conclusion, the marriage of Alphonsus with the lovely Iphigenia. And yet the excessive temerity, the infatuated confidence of the hero, impart a poetic colouring to the figure of Alphonsus, which, however, is again a copy of Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine.' Even the language is an imitation, except that it is not so pompous and pretentious, but still far from possessing Marlowe's energy, Marlowe's rhetorical grandeur and tragic pathos. I conjecture therefore that it was written soon after 'Tamburlaine,' that is, it probably appeared about the year 1587; it was, however, not printed till 1599, and this I regard as a proof of its great popularity with the English public.

The form of the whole piece is uncommon and poetically conceived: Venus accompanied by the Muses, recites the prologue, and at the same time takes the place of the Dumb Shows by giving, at the beginning of every act, a short *résumé* of the Past and announcing what the Future will bring. But according to the fiction upon which the play is founded, it is Venus also who, with divine creative power, and with the assistance of Calliope, writes the play herself, not with pen and ink, but with flesh and blood and living action, so that her description becomes an eventful history in the eyes of the spectators. This at the same time indicates the fundamental idea of the piece: wherever the all-powerful goddess of love and beauty herself plans the actions and destinies of mortals, there extraordinary things come to pass with playful readiness and grace, and where there is no opposition, love and beauty reward the toilless task of the fortunate hero. It is only a pity that this poetical thought lies far more without than within the action.

'The Historie of Orlando Furioso' (London, 1594-1599),*

* Dyce, pp. 85-112.

is indeed free from Marlowe's influences, and a genuine composition of Greene's, bearing the peculiar stamp of his style very distinctly marked; but it is too light a production, and was perhaps hastily sketched, in order to furnish the Queen with a new play for one of her hurriedly arranged Court festivals. At all events, on the title-page of both editions, it is expressly mentioned that the piece had been performed before her Majesty. Although upon the whole it is a thoroughly popular composition, still it is evident from the language that it was written for the Court; the learned similes and allusions to ancient mythology, the heroic legends and history, of which Greene was otherwise too fond, are here amassed to excess; the dramatic characters recite passages from classic authors; the enchantress Melissa, on one occasion, gives a whole speech in Latin hexameters; nay, even Orlando bursts forth into Italian rhymes in a moment of deep grief and rage at Angelica's supposed infidelity—a want of taste which brings the already unsuccessful scene, the centre of the whole action, down to the sphere of the ridiculous. Even if we assume, with Dyce,* that the extant prints give us the play in an imperfect form, yet, in my opinion, it stands below the usual level of Greene's dramatic talent.

I shall here mainly follow 'The honourable Historie of frier Bacon and frier Bongay, etc.' (London, 1594, 1599, 1630),† because it is generally acknowledged to be one of Greene's best works, and all his already mentioned merits can be easily recognised in it.‡ The old popular tradition of Friar Bacon and his magic arts is interwoven with the story of the loves of Prince Edward and Earl Lacy, for the forester's beautiful daughter, Margaret of Fressingfield. The connection, however, is entirely epical, and merely external and accidental. The fundamental idea of the legend and the love story have nothing in common. It is the same with the development of the two actions; in

* Dyce, p. 31.

† Dyce, pp. 159–178.

‡ Another reason of my having specially selected this piece is, that in Tieck's *Vorschule Shakespeares* there is a good translation of this play, and my German readers would therefore be able to judge for themselves.

the one Friar Bacon's ambitious design fails through an external cause,—the carelessness and stupidity of his assistant—at all events no explanation is given as to why the all-wise and all-powerful Bacon should confide such important services to such a fool; in the other, the sudden magnanimity of the Prince, his withdrawal in favour of Laey, and the latter's hesitation and trials are equally unaccounted for; both are events rather than actions. King Henry III. and the Emperor Frederick II., the King of Castile and his daughter, form (in the style of a popular ballad) a brilliant framework—the gold groundwork of the ancient pictures—they do not in the least enter into the action of the play, but rather accompany it with the grotesque and symbolical splendour of the Court manners and language of the day, and rather accept whatever the other characters determine and accomplish. Nevertheless the scenes run into one another smoothly and naturally; the action represented advances in a measured and graceful movement; most of the characters, and especially the comic ones—in their epic relief-like style of treatment—may be called well executed, and the whole piece is pervaded by a breath of pure, fresh air, a bright, harmonious colouring, and a unity of the general tone which, it is true, cannot compensate for the missing centre of an internal causal connection, but surrounds the heterogeneous elements as by an invisible bond. In short, the piece possesses in an eminent degree all the merits of Greene's style.

Even if the already mentioned 'pleasant conceytet comedie of George-a-Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield' (London, 1599),* was not written by this author, still it is composed so completely in his style, and is so excellent of its kind that, for this reason alone, it deserves a short notice at our hands; and this all the more so as, in the notice upon one of the old prints, already referred to, R. Greene is called the author of the piece, and consequently, in addition to the internal reasons of its genuineness, we have this external confirmation as well. The subject in this case is again furnished by two popular legends which are connected with each other, and also with certain events

* Dyce, pp. 249-268.

from the reign of the 'good king Edward' (probably the extremely popular Edward III.), without regard to chronological order or historical truth.

'George-a-Greene,' the faithful and chivalrous 'pinner,' and 'Robin Hood,' the mighty hunter, are still held in lively remembrance by Englishmen, and at the time when Greene wrote his piece they were favourite national heroes. These characters, therefore, have been conceived and treated by the poet in the very spirit of the legends and old ballads, which were then current. Extraordinary strength of body and an equal amount of courage and sense of honour, a lively cheerful temperament, loyalty to their king and attachment to their own class and their own mode of life, are the principal characteristics. Accordingly they are drawn in an epic style, merely from that side of their characters, by which they are connected with external relations, circumstances and events; their inward life of mind and soul is rarely if ever taken into consideration. In like manner the action is spun out from external causes, from accidental coincidences of circumstances and events. With the defeat of the rebellious Earl of Kendall by the Pinner, and of the Scottish king by old Musgrave, and their delivery as captives to the king, the thread of the first part of the story comes to an end. Then Robin Hood appears, and the action suddenly takes a new turn, the shoemakers of the merry town of Bradford playing the most prominent part; in short, we have the beginning of an entirely new piece in which, however, the story of the Pinner's love for the fair Bettris is incidentally brought to a close. It is manifest that the several parts of the action are no more closely connected with one another than, for instance, the exploits of Diomedes with the anger of the godlike Achilles, or the adventurous travels of Ulysses with the manner in which he rid himself of his troublesome suitors. If, however, we for once allow this epical style to pass and overlook the faults against dramatic composition, the piece as a whole will be found so pleasing, the characters so unpretending and drawn with so few, yet clear and firm strokes, the language so natural and appropriate, the wit so sprightly and naïve, the whole pervaded by

a tone of such homely cheerfulness, and the various elements held together by a spirit so in accordance with the old English popular life and character, that, in my opinion, it ranks higher even than 'Friar Bacon.'

Collier places the first appearance of 'Friar Bacon' in the year 1588: from Henslowe's 'Diary' it appears to have been acted in London in 1591.* The 'Pinner of Wakefield' may have been composed or rather put into its present shape somewhere about the same time, perhaps in 1589-90. For I think, it may pretty safely be assumed that Robert Greene originally wrote the piece in prose, and that he afterwards hastily and flightily changed it into blank verse. This seems to be so decidedly confirmed by the whole character of the diction, and more especially by the treatment of the blank verse—as compared with others of Greene's pieces—that I do not entertain the slightest doubt about the matter. Accordingly, the play in its first origin would be one of Greene's earliest works, and was very probably written about the year 1585.

* Dyce, p. 32.

CHAPTER XII.

CHRISTOPHER (KIT) MARLOWE.

MARLOWE's oldest known piece, 'Tamburlaine the Great'—which Collier* for very plausible, not to say safe reasons, places in the year 1586—was the first, as already repeatedly stated, that gave rise to the great linguistic reform in the English popular drama, that is, to the introduction of blank verse. The courage with which he, as quite a young poet (perhaps even on the occasion of his first dramatic attempt), ventured upon this undertaking, the cleverness and assurance with which he carried it out, the power and independence of his mind manifested in it, all throw some light upon his character. Marlowe, as Dyce has but recently ascertained, was the son of a shoemaker, and was born in Canterbury in 1564, probably towards the end of February (he was baptised, according to the Church register, on the 26th of February). He obtained free admission into the King's school at Canterbury, where he received his first education. Afterwards—probably by the help and assistance of a rich patron, whom he perhaps found in the person of Sir Roger Manwood—he went to Cambridge, studied at Benet College and was made B.A. in 1583, M.A. in 1587.† His wild, passionate nature seems however, at an early date, to have driven him from the career he had entered upon. It is probable that, soon after quitting the University, he became an actor—this at least is reported in one of the uncertain sources from which our knowledge in regard to his life is drawn—but appears soon afterwards to have left the stage possibly in order to live an entirely free and unrestrained life, and to be able to devote all his energies to literary work. At all

* Collier, iii. 108 ff.

† A. Dyce, *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, London, 1850, i. p. i. ff.

events we do not find his name mentioned among the members of any of the contemporary companies of players. On the other hand, several of his great tragedies appeared in quick succession: about 1588 'The Life and Death of Dr. Faustus;' about 1589 his 'Jew of Malta;' in the following year, in any case, at least, no earlier than towards the end of 1589, 'The Massacre at Paris;' about the same time, his 'Dido, Queen of Carthage,'—a piece which he wrote in conjunction with Th. Nash, or which the latter perhaps 'finished'—and not long afterwards his 'Edward the Second,' which is probably his last work and in England is considered his best.*

These six dramas, in addition to some others which *perhaps* belong to him, or have been lost,† Marlowe composed in the course of six or seven years, during which he lived an unsteady and dissolute life, distracted by violent passions. In this respect he rivalled his associate Robert Greene, with this difference, however, that the latter's failings resulted from carelessness and weakness of character; with Marlowe, on the contrary, who possessed rather too much than too little strength of mind and will, it was the immoderation of his feelings and desires, his passionate susceptibility of temperament and a certain violence in his whole being, that were the cause of his ruinous irregularities. Like his life and character, so his death also was of a violent kind; according to unanimous reports, he died in the prime of life, on the first

* Dyce, *l.c.*, i. pp. x., xiv., xx., xxii. f., xxviii. f.

† *Lust's Dominion*, which was formerly attributed to Marlowe, is not his work, and was written later by Dekker, Haughton, and Day, as has already been pointed out by the Editor of Dodsley's Edition, ii. 311 f. Compare Collier, iii. 96, Dyce, i. p. lviii. f. The old *Taming of a Shrew* also, which some have recently wished to attribute to him, is certainly not written by him, as Dyce (*l.c.* p. lxv. f.) has clearly proved. On the other hand Dyce is of the opinion that the two historical dramas: *The first part of the Contention between the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, and *The True Tragedie of Richard, Duke of York*—upon which the second and third parts of Shakspeare's *Henry VI.* are founded—were, if not entirely, still for the most part, from his pen, and that he likewise had a hand in the old play of *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (*l.c.*, pp. lx. f. lxv.). In regard to this question I refer the reader to that portion of this work which will examine some of Shakspeare's dramas of doubtful origin.

of June 1593, at Deptford, of a wound which he had received in a fight, having, as Meres relates, in a fit of jealousy attacked a rival in love—one Francis Archer, a low, common man—with a drawn dagger.*

Marlowe, in all essential points, was a direct contrast to Robert Greene; for while the latter found pleasure in remaining on a flat surface and in a calm smoothness of movement, Marlowe strove to mount the stormy heights towards the grand, the mighty, and the extraordinary. He, in fact, possessed a vigorous, fiery spirit, an energetic will, with the soul of a Titan, a free, reckless mind, and an independence and boldness of thought which shrank from no consequences, in short, his nature was great in its very elements. But his heart was waste and wild, and it is from the heart that every really great thought proceeds. His whole being inclined to licentious dissipation, to irregular caprice, despising alike moderation and law. Accordingly in his hand, the forcible becomes the forced, the uncommon the unnatural, whereas the grand and sublime degenerate into the grotesque and monstrous. In the same way as his own breast was besieged by immoderate passions and desires, so he saw in the world around him only a titanic conflict between mighty forces, one against another, which ultimately destroy and annihilate themselves; and accordingly in him moral necessity manifests itself *only* in ruin and desolation.† In Marlowe's pieces therefore, the tragic element almost invariably degenerates into the horrible; with him the essence of tragedy does not consist in the fall of the truly noble, great and lovely, as occasioned by their own weakness, one-sidedness and want of freedom, but in the annihilating conflict of the primary elements of human nature, the blind struggle between the most vehement emotions and passions. Of the ideas of right and duty his heroes are utterly ignorant; a character led by a truly moral motive, is a thing not met with in any one of his plays; of a discord in the moral nature of man, of a struggle of moral emotions with sensual desires and

* Dyce, i. p. xxxiii. ff.

† Greene, in his address to his friends and associates, at the end of his *Groat-worth of Wit*, etc., warns them above all things to give up their atheism and Machiavellism. (Dyce, *loc. cit.* pp. xxvi. f. xxxiii.)

selfish motives, we never hear a word: blind desires, emotions and passions have the exclusive dominion over all the workings in the life and actions of men.

Accordingly, Marlowe often accumulates monstrous enormities and crimes to such a pitch, that no corresponding catastrophe or adequate atonement can be devised for them; and hence, the close of the piece is like a low, narrow outlet through which the mass of action seeks in vain to force its way.] Then again he causes towns and countries to be desolated by a fire that has arisen accidentally; gigantic passions and unheard of actions are developed out of insignificant and very ordinary motives; nowhere is there a relation between cause and effect, object and means, beginning and end. The downfall of his tragic heroes may therefore distress and agitate, but can never elevate the mind. Yet Marlowe's mental vigour enabled him to do that which Greene never succeeded in doing, namely, to connect and condense the poetical matter. Most of Marlowe's dramas are founded upon a definite and peculiar view of life and the world, which forms the basis of the composition and its internal organic unity. In so far his composition is more solid and polished, so that Scottowe is wrong when, even in this respect, he denies that Marlowe possesses any artistic power of arrangement. Yet, on the other hand, Marlowe is frequently too diffuse in detail; his scenes do not fit into one another easily and naturally, but are strung together arbitrarily without any plan, and in this respect certainly betoken a want of artistic judgment. The action not unfrequently stands stock-still, while certain incoherent excrescences become attached to it; in short, the intrinsic unity of idea is devoid of extrinsic finish and harmony, the external form, angular and clumsy. In a formally similar manner his characters are drawn with broad strokes, glaring colours and strong lights and shades; they are seldom truly grand, and for the most part are grotesque and monstrous, yet always bold and powerful, but also invariably one-sided.

Where Greene is weakest, Marlowe, again, appears strongest; he possesses the power of portraying the inner states of the soul, especially vehement mental emotions, in a striking and effective manner. But his characters

are generally speaking nothing but emotion, nothing but passion; viewed from this side they appear too full; the cup, as it were, is continually overflowing, and the perpetual ferment and agitation, the perpetual explosions, do not permit any finer colouring, any changes between light and shade, of the ebb and flow between quiet consideration and passionate vehemence, that is, do not allow of the various stages of a progressive development. Viewed from this side, Marlowe's dramas are totally devoid of movement. The emotions and passions, upon which everything turns, and with them the incidents of the action, are, as it were, ready; they exist, but why or wherefore we do not know; all reflection is excluded; his characters seem to have but few or no thoughts, and accordingly, in Marlowe's dramas, we rarely meet with general maxims, this domain of the mind he has left altogether uncultivated. But what we most especially miss in him is the animated correlation between the outer world and the individuality of the dramatic personages. In Greene, actions and events are generally introduced from without, but in Marlowe the motives generally proceed from within; his characters act, not because they are induced by corresponding motives, not because they have *become to be* what they are, but because they *are* what they were from the beginning.

Marlowe's diction also, corresponds with these merits and defects of his compositions. In the same way that, with his peculiar view of life, he eccentrically broke through the general conception and the prevailing circle of ideas, so his language also, struck a tone which was perfectly new and unheard of in those days. The language of comedy, i. e., the language of conversation, of fun and wit, had it is true already become developed to a certain extent; writers had made some happy attempts to clothe emotion, feeling, contemplation and reflection in appropriate words; but no poet had hitherto either ventured or been able to speak the language of full and unrestrained passion, or to imitate the storm of its violent ebullitions, the fury of vehement desires and emotions, and the raging struggle in the inmost centre of the soul. The feeble attempts hitherto made to breathe into language

passionate grandeur and tragic pathos, seemed like a few lost chords when compared with the full and mighty masses of sound which Marlowe suddenly brought forward in conflict with one another. By this mean he, as it seems, produced a great and lasting effect. And in fact, his diction when compared with Shakspeare's, has something high sounding, energetic and exciting, which distinctly reflects the titanic struggles of his soul; we sometimes find such great originality and boldness of expression, that he is scarcely surpassed, even by Shakspeare. But his diction is throughout wanting in intensity, tenderness, and grace, and in the same way that, in his invention and characterisation he aims at what is massive, imposing and extraordinary, so as regards language he heaps one superabundant period on the top of the other, aspires to unusual figures and turns of speech, and falls at almost every step into a pompous, bombastic, and unnatural style.

This new, still defective it is true, but, in spite of its faults, truly dramatic language, was the special cause, as I believe, why Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine' attracted so much attention, and was so frequently imitated that it is regarded as marking an epoch in the history of the English drama. There can be no doubt after reading the passages which Collier* quotes from Nash's 'Address to the students of the two Universities' to Greene's 'Menaphon' which appeared in 1587, and from Greene's 'Epistle to the Readers' of his 'Perimedes the Blacksmith' (1588)—that it was not till 1585-86 that blank verse first obtained a firm footing on the public stage, and that it was Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine' which specially effected this innovation. However, these passages do not prove, as far as I see, that the popular stage down to that time was utterly unacquainted with blank verse, and that 'Tamburlaine' was, first popular piece that employed it.

altered the juggling — emphasis seems to me to lie on 'motherwits,' not on 'rhyming')—that is, common home-made wit, ordinary invention, everyday stuff—he rather boasts of having a

* Collier, iii. 108 ff.

grander and more dignified *subject* and a new and higher *style* for dramatic art. In like manner it is not the introduction of the new kind of verse which Nash and Greene ridicule, but rather his 'swelling bombast, his presumption of wishing to set the end of scholarism in an English blankverse,' and his attempts 'to outbrave better pens' by mere high sounding words; in short they ridiculed the error which seemed to consider that art consisted merely of a high sounding and pathetic diction.

That blank verse was not altogether as foreign to the popular stage as Collier seems to suppose, even though it may still have been unusual, is proved by Peele's festive pageant which he wrote in 1585 for the entry of the Mayor of Wolstan Dixie, and which was printed in the same year.* Here the speech of the Moor, with which the play opens, is written in blank verse, all the rest, however, is certainly still in rhyme. It is also highly probable that 'Gorboduc,' which was so well received at Court, and which became common property at an early date by being printed, may likewise have found its way on to the popular stage. Still the few interspersed blank verses of Peele and other poets probably made as little impression as the long speeches of 'Gorboduc,' because the subject was too unfavourable for the new form of verse, which demanded pathos and grandeur if it was to attract notice. It was this that Marlowe introduced; by this and by the great cleverness with which, from the very beginning, he arranged the whole beauty of the new dress for inspection, he succeeded in procuring so complete a conquest for blank verse that, within a short time, the rhymed Alexandrines, hitherto in use, became quite obsolete, and even Nash and Greene found themselves obliged to follow Marlowe's example. In so far his 'Tamburlaine,' in reference also to rhythm and versification, must certainly be regarded as marking an epoch.

As regards the piece itself, it manifests in the most striking manner all the peculiarities of Marlowe's style.†

* Reprinted in Dyce's edition of Peele's works, p. 537.

† Some critics have indeed doubted, from internal reasons, whether the play was written by Marlowe (compare *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*. London, 1826, T. i. p. xix. f.). However, these internal

It consists of two parts, the second of which, as the prologue intimates, was added by the author after the first had met with its very favourable reception. The first part ('Tamburlaine the Great, who from a Scythian Shepherd, etc.' London 1590) is however in itself scarcely an independent drama, because it has neither conclusion nor end. Without the second part the action would, so to speak, lose itself in the sand, for the conclusion—Tamburlaine's marriage with Zenocrate, daughter of the sultan of Egypt—is no proper end for a piece which, as already said, represents in monotonous succession nothing but battles, victories and conquests. It is 'The Second Part of the bloody conquests of the mightie Tamburlaine' which first gives the whole an ideal unity, and clearly sets forth the idea of life by which it is pervaded and upon which it is founded. It contains, in fact, Marlowe's general conception of life, life as a titanic struggle of rude forces one against the other, the strongest and boldest of which carries off the victory; but these are controlled by the chastening rod of an invisible, almighty hand, which from time to time interposes with some terrible scourge, so as to bend the most defiant spirits, and to crush the refractory. Tamburlaine himself is, on the one hand, a scourge in the hands of this inapproachable power, on the other a titanic spirit, continually threatening and challenging the gods themselves, and finally, with wanton hands, overthrowing their altars. The poet places this action in mysterious connection with the downfall of his hero: Tamburlaine—when the death of his beloved Zenocrate has driven him into a savage rage against fate and he has strewn the onward course of his victories with deeds of horrible cruelties—dies, not like an ordinary mortal, but by an invisible blow from the hand of the Deity himself, who strikes him down at the moment when he is having the temple and

reasons are in themselves of no importance, and Collier (*l.c.* iii. 113 f.), agreeing with Dyce and accepting the testimonies of Henslowe, G. Hervey, and Heywood, which unanimously declare Marlowe to be the author, has completely refuted them. Bodensiedt (*l.c.* p. 176 ff.) gives a careful analysis of the piece, together with a translation of some of the scenes

books of Mahomet burnt, and is abjuring the service of the Prophet. Although the piece is full of action, which however exhibits many excrescences and inappropriate episodes that are merely hung on externally (for instance the war between Orcanes and Sigmund of Hungary, the story of Olympia, etc.), still the diction, in its rhetorical fulness and pathetic force, decidedly predominates over the action in a narrower sense. But the effective and grand passages which surround images, frequently as bold as they are excellent, are so thickly encrusted with bombast and hyperbole, that the fulness and weight of the diction cannot produce its proper effect. The characters although firmly and powerfully drawn are so exalted above the level of human nature, that they verge upon caricature, and are so exactly alike in their defiance and arrogance, their stubbornness and fierceness, that the monotony of the action is only equalled by the monotony of the characterisation. Lastly, the composition is too straightforward, it is devoid of all complication and hence of development; the piece in reality has no catastrophe, the conclusion is merely the final point of a series of successive events.

Still 'Tamburlaine,' in my opinion, is one of Marlowe's best works, his subsequent dramas are decidedly weaker. Thus in 'The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus,'* the profound fundamental thought of the old German legend has indeed been generally retained, and in so far the piece is a kind of *pendant* to *Tamburlaine*; for as the latter, in a more external manner, wishes to subdue the whole world by force of arms, Faustus endeavours to conquer it, so to speak, from within, by the force of thought, by science and philosophy, and as he does not succeed in this he seeks assistance from magic, the devil and his infernal arts. Faustus and *Tamburlaine* meet their ruin in their titanic struggle to submit neither to control nor law, and yet the fundamental idea, Faustus' insatiable thirst for knowledge, his despair about the failure of his unwearied exertions, his contempt of all

* Bodenstein, l.c. p. 205 ff. gives an excellent translation of this piece.

deceitful appearance of learning and knowledge, in short, all that Goethe in his exposition has depicted in so masterly and deeply effective a manner, Marlowe has only imperfectly indicated in the first scene; the development of the play drops it entirely. Faustus, a weak character who continually repents of and then renews his compact with the devil, and is animated by senseless vanity—merely wishing himself to be talked about—aspires only to excite the astonishment of the world and the favour of the great by means of his unprecedented arts. The whole of the second, third and fourth acts are accordingly filled partly with sentimental attempts at repentance and contrition, partly with the tricks which Faustus exhibits before the Emperor and his Dukes, or with the scurrilous pranks which he plays upon the Pope and his cardinals, a heretic knight and his friends, but more especially upon the clown of the piece, and his companions, the carters and horse-dealers; these scenes are written quite in the style of the German *Puppenspiel-Faust*, from which Marlowe perhaps drew his material. It is only the last scenes of the fifth act, which in some degree rise to the same tragic height attained by Marlowe in 'Tamburlaine,' although these also only represent the vain effort of Faustus to submit penitently and trustfully to the divine grace, and his despairing dread of conscience and death, that is, Faustus always in the frailty of his character, far below Tamburlaine.

The fundamental idea of the legend of Faust was evidently beyond the comprehension of Marlowe's intellect; he did not possess the requisite depth of thought; he, as it were, only had at his command passions and emotions. His efforts did, it is true, aim at the lofty and the grand in every department, but his mind was incapable of filling his thoughts with a corresponding amount of substance, and hence the execution is far inferior to the intention. Perhaps, however, even Shakspeare might have been unsuccessful, had he attempted to work upon the legend of Faust, for it is no subject for the English mind; as it was produced from the depth of the German character, so it could be worthily formed into an artistic work only in the hands of a German poetical genius. This is a kind

of excuse for Marlowe, and moreover, it is more than probable that none of the old editions of the play give Marlowe's text in a pure and uncorrupted state. The oldest edition is dated 1604; but even seven years previously (in Dec. 1597), according to Henslowe's Diary, Th. Dekker had provided the piece with so called additions, and in Nov. 1602, Birde and S. Rowley supplied 'Dr. Fostus' with further 'adicyons' which, to judge from the sum paid for them must have been very considerable, and may have been much the same thing as a complete remodelling of the piece.* No doubt the piece was at that time again rehearsed by Henslowe's company, and, in consequence of this revival, reprinted, of course, in the form in which it was then brought upon the stage. This supposition, which was expressed in the second edition of this work, and which is supported by the style and character of the play, the inequality of the language and versification, the many comic scenes, etc., has since then, through Dyce's careful investigations, become a matter of certainty; it is now firmly ascertained that neither the edition of 1604, nor that of 1616 give Marlowe's text in an uncorrupted form.† We are accordingly scarcely entitled to pronounce a judgment upon the play.

Whether Marlowe's 'Massacre at Paris with the Death of the Duke of Guise,' etc.,‡ fared still worse by having, as Collier thinks, come down to us in a very mutilated condition, is a question so closely connected with the other concerning the author of the two old 'histories': 'The first Part of the Contention,' etc., and 'The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York,' that I must reserve the answer till I come to that part of this work which will discuss some of Shakspeare's plays of doubtful origin. If, in the meantime, we take the piece as it has come down to us in the only extant edition, it certainly is only like a skeleton of a drama. And yet even as a mere skeleton it shows us more of Marlowe's mind than is revealed in 'Faustus.' The subject is the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and its

* *Henslowe's Diary*, etc., p. 228. Dyce, ii. p. xvii.

† Dyce, i. p. xviii.

‡ Printed in London without mentioning the date, but which according to Collier and Dyce was probably printed in 1595.

immediate consequences. Ambition, love of power, revenge, and fanaticism war against and destroy one another in a general carnage, so that at the end the only surviving person is the King of Navarre, the head of the Huguenots; he finally ascends the throne and concludes the piece with a vow to take terrible vengeance upon the Pope and all papal prelates. The poet's object evidently was to expose the ambition and the blind, bloodthirsty fanaticism of the Roman Catholic party of the day, and to exhibit in contrast Protestantism in its glory and future power; in short this drama was one of those pieces with a tendency, which were brought upon the English stage about and after 1588, the year of the destruction of the Spanish Armada, and were called forth by the massacre of St. Bartholomew and its consequences. Whether the poet succeeded in giving this tendency an appropriate dramatic form is a question which we shall, in the meantime, leave undecided; but this we may affirm, in spite of the above mentioned question, and without doing Marlowe an injustice, that he has not succeeded in breathing into his drama that higher historical spirit which rises above all party feelings.

I shall pass over 'the Tragedy of Dido, Queene of Carthage. Played by the Children of Her Majesties Chappell. Written by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nash' (London 1594), for although the greater part of the play was probably written by Marlowe himself, and, upon the whole, it is not unworthy of his name, still it ought, nevertheless, not to be taken into consideration here; not so much because it cannot be ascertained with certainty how great a share Nash took in the work,* as because it is clearly a *Court* tragedy, that is, not a free composition, but one variously dependent upon the consideration shown to the Queen, and to the taste of the Court. This, in the first place, is evident from the remark on the title-page of the old edition, where it is said that the piece was

* Collier (iii. 225), although he can only mention a few passages that may with safety be attributed to Nash, thinks that Marlowe's share in the work might be determined with some degree of certainty; but Dyce (l.c. i. p. xi.) justly maintains that this would be an impossibility.

played by the boys of Her Majesty's Chapel. But even the inner character of the drama seems, as it were, to be pervaded by the perfumed air of the Court. Queen Dido, who is courted by many and worshipped by all, is, by her second name of Eliza, half and half a poetical reflection of Her Majesty, and, on the other hand, Her Majesty is again evidently the Phoenix which, as Dido prophesies shortly before her death, shall rise from its ashes to combat and annihilate Rome, the colony of the faithless Æneas. In several places we find inserted Latin passages from Virgil, which are clearly meant only to compliment the Queen on her learning, for otherwise, in Marlowe, such unpoetic embellishments—which completely disturb the whole illusion—are extremely unusual, except in 'Faustus,' in the characterisation of which they are appropriate; as far as I remember they occur in his 'Edward II.' but once or twice. Unfortunately these examples of classical learning are introduced just in passages of the greatest pathos, once in the parting scene between Dido and Æneas, on another occasion at the moment when Dido in despair throws herself upon the funeral pile, hence they considerably detract from the tragic effect of the drama. Besides this, all Olympus puts in an appearance: Jupiter, Juno, Venus, and Cupid take an active part in the action; Dido's love for Æneas is a work of the intriguing Venus; Æneas' decision to forsake his beloved, is but the result of an express command from Jupiter, delivered by Mercury. This gives the whole piece an epic and thoroughly undramatic character. Lastly, the whole action turns upon love, and upon love only: Dido is in love with Æneas, Jarbas with Dido, and Anna, the latter's sister, is again desperately enamoured of Jarbas; Dido kills herself because Æneas has forsaken her, Jarbas, because Dido has burnt herself, and Anna because Jarbas has committed suicide; in short, the whole drama is of a sentimental character, very different from Marlowe's other pieces, and is based more upon womanly susceptibility, than upon passion and manly pathos; and even though several passages are very well executed, they are entirely wanting in Marlowe's bold, powerful mind. It is quite clear that, if the essential

parts were sketched and worked out by him then, to please the Court, he became untrue to himself.

I have now, therefore, only a few remarks to add about those two of Marlowe's tragedies which are usually regarded as his best dramas: 'The Jew of Malta,' and his 'Edward the Second.*' Both possess Marlowe's merits in a high degree, but, on the other hand, his faults cannot escape the eye of the attentive reader. 'The famous Tragedie of the Rich Jew of Malta' (London 1633), as the poet himself intimates in the prologue, is wholly based upon Macchiavellism—a view of life which places human existence at the extreme point of egotism. The powerful instinct of self-preservation, of happiness, of power and wealth wages war against the whole world: human nature is rent asunder, that one primary element of it—degenerated into a revengeful and murderous fury against all mankind—is torn apart from all other instincts and forces. Thus the Jew, the principal character of the piece, appears animated by passionate selfishness, inflamed with boundless rage against his persecutors, inspired by a thirst for vengeance, that does not even spare his own child, and sacrifices the guilty as well as the innocent. But the Governor also, and Selim Calymath, Christians as well as Mahommedans, act with the same unscrupulous egotism. This, in the case of the Jew, is carried to such a pitch, that his own ruin becomes inevitable. And yet we do not see what can have produced such a monster; in the first scenes Barabas is described as a rich, avaricious, purse-proud merchant, whereas some scenes afterwards stung, it is true, by an atrocious, but at the same time a common and by him a not unexpected act of injustice on the part of the Governor, he becomes a monster in vindictiveness, hatred and malice, without shame and fear, devoid of the commonest feelings, and cruel and bloodthirsty even to madness; he preserves this state of inward boiling passion and thirst of destruction throughout the play. Although it is meant to appear as if all the atrocious actions, which follow one another in rapid succession, and which in spite of their enormity are invariably successful, were merely the result of the Jew's

* Both of these plays have been translated into German, and may be found in E. von Bülow's *Altenglischer Schaubühne*.

extreme cunning and ingenuity, still it must be admitted that in reality chance plays a prominent part, and moreover a chance that appears the more capricious, as all these enormities have no higher motive, no important effect upon the life and the characters of the dramatic personages. The Jew dies, in the midst of his crimes, with blasphemy and cursing on his lips; everything is the same at the end as it was from the beginning. Besides this the scenes change so rapidly, without any active bond of connection, the action proceeds so much in a straight line and by fits and starts, the persons come and go without apparent reason, and are so ready at hand when wanted, a number of subordinate figures (such as the three Jews, the monks and nuns, the mother of Don Mathias, etc.) appear and disappear so unexpectedly, and are interwoven with the action in so entirely an external manner, that the defects of the composition are at once apparent.

Far more perfect is 'The troublesome raigne, and lamentable death of Edward the Second' (London, 1598), and might, in fact, be regarded as Marlowe's best work. It is an historical tragedy in the style of the day, i.e., historical in the subordinate sense of a biography; for in reality it is only the history of the life of Edward II. that is represented, the state and people play no part, or at most only incidentally. Life is here conceived under the important and fundamental relation subsisting between the individuality of man, the inward bias of his mind, his natural instincts and inclinations on the one hand, and the outward position assigned to him by birth and a higher ordinance on the other. This relation is destroyed by the King's character and behaviour, and perverted into contradictions; and he thus prepares his own ruin. It is not that Edward has his favourites, but that he at the same time makes these capriciously chosen favourites great nobles and ministers of the state, leaving everything in their hands, and that he confounds his individuality with his dignity as King, his personal inclinations with the demands and requirements of the state, that he is unable to distinguish the monarch from the man, thus undutifully dissolving the relation between them—this it is that constitutes the pernicious weakness of his otherwise good and amiable disposition.

The Queen, on the contrary, is led into infidelity against her lord and master, and into the arms of Mortimer, through the perplexity in which she is placed as mother and Queen; the Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward III., has the sad alternative of choosing between filial love and his title to the Crown; if he follows the one, he loses the other. Lastly, the nobles of the kingdom, likewise, mistake their position, and suffer themselves to be led into perjury and rebellion by their hatred of the King's favourites. For this reason all the guilty persons are stricken by the tragic Nemesis; and thus the conception of life which forms the basis, if viewed from this fundamental relation, is clearly and distinctly reflected in the principal parts of the whole.

I must content myself here with setting forth this merit of the piece; its many defects I shall point out in the last portion of this work (to which I have already frequently referred), when comparing the piece with Shakspeare's earliest historical dramas. I here only draw attention to the fact that it is devoid of that rapid movement of the action which generally distinguishes Marlowe's dramas; everything invariably turns upon assurances of love, upon the wrath, rage, lamentations and grief of the King in regard to Gaveston. This lyrical element, the expression of emotion and passion, is prominent throughout, and is indeed generally well represented, but so often repeated that it becomes tedious and wearisome. The diction corresponds with this; it is generally more moderate, more natural and not so unequal as in the 'Jew of Malta,' nor so bombastic as in 'Tamburlaine,' but we still meet with occasional excrescences, far-fetched similes and overwrought attempts at vigorous expression.

It is obvious that Marlowe's compositions bear a peculiar and very different stamp from those of Greene and Peele. To characterise his style of writing briefly, we may say that his chief fault is that he treats dramatic poetry too much in the lyrical style. There is a decided predominance of the lyrical element, that is, of the subjectivity of the mind, feelings, emotions, and pathos, in short, of the personal I, with its personal sympathies and antipathies, impulses and desires, motives and objects; the epic side of

life, therefore, that is, the outer world and its influence upon the formation of the character, upon the will and the career of the dramatic personages, the past as the bearer of the present, the importance of a firmly established unalterable dispensation of the world, which gives the standard and law for the human will and actions, is placed by him too much in the background. This is the reason why everything is so entirely passion and emotion, why his characters and their doings—being restrained by no objective standard—are so apt to become monstrous and unnatural, and why consideration and thoroughness of the motives, the progressive development and the harmony of movement in action and language, are wanting. In many respects, accordingly, Marlowe and Kyd may be regarded as a decided contrast to Greene and Peele. Kyd's compositions also suffer from this one-sided predominance of the lyrical element in the above explained sense of the word, while in the case of Peele and Greene, on the contrary, there is a one-sidedness of the epical element, which lowers their style into an epicising mannerism. Marlowe, however, falls into this mannerism from another side; he does not represent the subjective lyrical element of human life and existence in its full pure truth, but in a conception peculiar to himself and to his individuality; he arbitrarily sets forth only the one side of the emotions of human life and lets the other drop; immoderate desires, passions and selfishness alone predominate in his pieces; his heroes are animated by a titanic struggle to make the world subjective to their own individual self; all the other elements of mental life, but more especially the *ethical* forces and relations, are scarcely indicated even in their first germs; the centre of attraction always lies beyond them. This corresponds with his general view of life, which is entirely peculiar to himself and in which he stands a solitary contrast to the other poets of his day. I have already pointed out the nature of this view, for it distinctly exhibits the principal points which distinguish the mind of modern times from the spirit of the Middle Ages, though in a dim, exaggerated and somewhat distorted manner. In both cases the ruling principle is no longer—as in the Middle Ages—the domain of certain authoritative powers and general ideas, no longer the

division of life into closed circles, in which the individual formed, as it were, but a single radius; on the contrary it is the subjectivity of the mind, the personality and its struggle to rid itself of all external restraints, of all guardianship, and not merely to assert its freedom and independence as an inviolable right, but also to procure for itself freedom of action and respect. In Marlowe, however, this conflict still has a romantic mediæval character; it is as yet only an indefinite impulse, partly without reference to actual life, fantastic and idealistic, supported by a flight of the imagination which, on the one hand vanishes into endless space, and on the other is driven completely beyond reality up to a giddy height from which it necessarily falls of its own accord. In so far there is in Marlowe a predominance of the romanticism of the Middle Ages, but it is no longer filled with the fixed, and in itself consistent mediæval view of life and the world; in him we already find indications of the spirit of modern times, but it is not yet regulated by the standard and law which offer us a clearer knowledge of actual life in nature and history.

It is evident from this short sketch, how easy and yet again how difficult it was for *Shakspeare* to work upon, and with such predecessors and contemporaries. The materials were at hand, ready cut and polished; the foundation had been laid; all that was wanting was artistic skill to combine organically what as yet lay isolated and separate, or inappropriately mixed together. This, however, required the practised hand of a great architect. In other words, *Shakspeare's* vocation was to fuse together the dramatic styles of Marlowe and Greene in such a manner as to preserve their merits, and to lay aside their defects, and thereby to produce a new and superior style, which—as was demanded by the very idea of the drama—might comprise, in one perfect organic unity, both the epic and lyric forms of art. This, indeed, could be accomplished only by at the same time giving a greater profundity to the ideal subject-matter, and a more perfect development to the poetic form; and this could be effected only by giving decided prominence to the ethical elements of human nature, by reason of a

view of life which places the true value of the history of individuals, as well as of every nation, in ethical development and progress. None but a poetic genius, who brought with him the whole depth and fulness of the ideas prevailing in the Christian era of the world's history—and the full mystery of the beauty of form—could solve the problem. How Shakspeare filled the position which he subsequently held in the history of dramatic art, will hereafter be shown more at large; here we must be content with observing that, in perfect conformity with his position, he at first pursued the course upon which Greene and Marlowe had preceded him by a few steps. His 'Pericles, Prince of Tyre,' and (if the piece be his) the 'Life and Death of Thomas Cromwell' are evidently composed in Greene's style, while 'Titus Andronicus' resembles that of Marlowe. That he should surpass both in their respective styles was but to be expected, and indeed necessary if he was eventually to rise above them. In his 'Henry VI.' he is already far more original and independent; and in 'Romeo and Juliet' Shakspeare appears his full and perfect self. How perfectly he was conscious, in later times at least, of the problem he had to solve, in order to attain the goal which the English drama had in view, is shown by Hamlet's famous words: 'the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first, and now, was, and is, to hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature; to show *virtue* her own feature, *scorn* her own image, and the *very age and body of the time*, his form and pressure.' For these words prove that it was his perfectly conscious endeavour to raise the drama into the poetical reflex of history according to its ethical character in the past and present.

If therefore, in conclusion, it is asked how far Shakspeare was indebted to his predecessors and contemporaries, our answer must be that—in the narrower sense of the word—he could learn only as much as, in fact, admits of being learned in any art, the *technical part*, that is, become acquainted with the stage and theatrical practice, in other words, he could only learn how to arrange a piece in such a form that it admitted of being easily and conveniently represented without losing its effect in the representation.

This, however, depends chiefly upon the drama itself being drastic, i.e., developing a living, rapid and also *externally* visible action, hence that something is really accomplished on the stage, and that the persons do not merely—as the proverb has it—speak like books. Inasmuch as plays, in those days, were so invariably and exclusively written for the stage, that even in the prime of Shakspeare's career the publication of the works of a dramatic poet, as *literary* productions intended for reading, was looked upon by many as ridiculous, it cannot excite surprise that the older English poets are distinguished for their knowledge of the stage and theatrical practice. Even Marlowe's dramas—notwithstanding the preponderance of the lyrical element—possess a great amount of real action. How anxious Shakspeare was to learn, and how far also, he soon surpassed his own teachers, in this respect, must be well known to every one who has had the good fortune to see one of his plays performed intelligently and appropriately.

In this our paper age, the best dramas seem still to be written more for the reading than for the theatre-going public; but Shakspeare's plays are without exception in perfect conformity with the rules of the stage and therefore by a good performance gain as much as the former lose by a representation. In fact we cannot sufficiently value his dramatic style if we do not continually bear in mind, that he did not write for the press but only for the stage, and accordingly presumed that the performance would soften the often hard and sketchy delineation of the characters, the occasional dryness of the colouring, as well as the possible want of distinctness in the motives of the action and the dissonances in the composition.

If, on the other hand, it is asked, what Shakspeare could learn from his predecessors in regard to the ideal contents and artistic form, our answer must be—little and yet much. Little, because not a single work of his predecessors and contemporaries could furnish him with a satisfactory prototype—and yet again much, because the *general* style of dramatic art, which he found existing, the *general* course of the development which he entered upon, was pre-eminently adapted to lead his genius for dramatic

composition upon the right way, to mature it, and to bring it to perfection. If we seek to form a clearer idea of the peculiar character of the old English drama, by comparing it with the most famous theatres of all ages, we shall find that the German drama is in general too lyrical and contemplative, that emotion and passion, in place of bursting forth in action, rise only like the waters of a fountain to fall back from whence they arose; sentiment either revels elegiacally or is drawn within itself convulsively; reason reflects and philosophises, in place of merely serving the will, and presenting it with the means of realizing its plans and endeavours. The old Spanish drama, on the other hand, is too much inclined to the epical style or rather to romance, the modern epos; it consists throughout of dramatic legends, a cycle of romances, a series of actions and events, cast in the external form of a drama, which do not so much proceed from the personal character of the hero, but are imposed upon him in a more outward manner by the prevailing ideas of the time, by the peculiarly Spanish, inviolable moral code of love, of honour and of loyalty in the double form of blind submission to the will of the Sovereign, as well as to the claims of the Church: much in the same way as the Homeric heroes appear directed by the will and the councils of the gods.

The so-called classic drama of the French differs from these two, by the fact that, in its aping of the ancients it has adopted the plastic element and made it the principal motive of its construction; but the plastic element has here imperceptibly become a mere exhibition. The diction struts along with its bombastic rhetoric and artificial versification; passion flashes in the brilliancy of its fire and the glowing colours of its pathos; sentiment coquets with its own tenderness, reason with its own reflections and maxims. The action, however, comes off without anything or forms but the wooden platform upon which all the beautiful things are displayed. Even the Greek drama, at least the much admired tragedy, is merely a most successful combination of the lyrical and plastic elements; the charming power of the subjective pathos, in the equally charming form of plastic beauty,

so fascinates our senses, that we are scarcely aware of the slow progress of the action, the want of change of events, in short, that we are scarcely aware of the poverty of the real action. It is obviously deficient in the fulness of epic life, in the variety of individual characters, in the interaction of events interfering from without, with motives arising from within, which produce a complete poetico-dramatic picture of life.

All these elements—the lyrical pathos and the contemplative thought, the epic event and the plastic form—when borne and penetrated by the living principle of the *action*, are so essentially a part of the real drama, that it is only their equal consideration, as points of the representation equally entitled to attention, that constitute the truly dramatic style. I am still bold enough to maintain that the English drama approaches nearest to this ideal of the dramatic style, and this was the peculiarity which Shakspeare could and dared not alter, but could only develop further. He, it is true, leaves the plastic element too much in the background; it cannot obtain its full due, partly because the English drama has, as it were, too little flesh and blood, and the bones and sinews protrude too much, partly because it moves too rapidly and powerfully for the fulness and roundness, the calmness and dignity of the plastic element to become combined with it. This want—which Goethe and Schiller have so successfully remedied, were it not that they at the same time have detracted too much from the drastic life of the action!—may, however, be allowed to pass, especially as the English drama offers a not unworthy compensation. For, in place of the plastic element we have the picturesque, the contrasts of light and shape, of high and low, of seriousness and fun, of truth and fiction, the *chiaroscuro* of the various transitions from the sunlight of mid-day to darkest night, a play of colours of the most various kinds, and the most varied groupings, together with that romantic haziness of distance which connects reality with an ideal, future world. As in the case of painting, the figures show more beauty and harmony of colouring than of form and character, more richness of substance than perfection of form, more fulness of character

than refinement and grace of appearance; individual and characteristic features predominate greatly over what is general and ideal; the latter is implied more in the representation as a whole, in the centre of the action; in the individual figures it appears only indirectly, inasmuch as they take a part in the action, and appear as the bearers of the fundamental idea.

By all this we, indeed, only wish to say that the English drama from the very commencement, comprehended the nature of the action with a clearness, assurance and energy as no other had done. Action is the very soul of the drama, that which makes it a *drama*; but owing to the fact that in the English drama, action is considered more important than anything else, the drama has a certain coldness and demureness, it is not only devoid of all sentimentality, but exhibits almost invariably an indifference in regard to feeling, which I am inclined to call the historical, for, like history, it passes unsympathetically over the mental emotions of individuals, and gives them sympathy and attention only so far as they become actions. It possesses that peculiar humour, which again I am inclined to call the historical, which plays with the destinies of individuals, while representing them in the drastic fulness of life. In fact, the English drama has something caustic, demure and unpleasant, a certain abruptness and severity in the manner in which it treats all details, a dry colouring, glaring lights and marked shades, angular turns, un-aesthetical positions and shortenings, but—although frequently rather too much in the style of a sketch—it is always distinguished by sharp delineations, always by characteristic figures, always by life and movement in the individuals, as well as in the whole. The course which this movement describes is no broad high road, with seats for resting and open places for looking round and about, but a narrow irregular path; the advance is rapid, continual and unequal, sometimes proceeding peacefully, sometimes by fits and starts, digressive but always unceasingly urging its way onwards—like the advance of history. All subjects suit the English drama, the small occurrences of every-day life, as well as the great actions of the state, secret family events as well

as public affairs, profane as well as sacred history, the ancient legend with its wonders and dark colossal figures, as well as the bright present with its homely reality; human things and divine, high and low, foreign and native, all are embraced with equal love. In this respect it has a universality, which again I am inclined to call historical, because it comprises all the domains of life, except those in which there is no action. Lastly, the English language has a peculiar brevity and precision, a great sharpness and variety in the naming of all objects belonging to external, practical life, it has a great deal of bone and sinew, but little flesh and blood, hence a certain awkwardness of movement, looseness of combination, carelessness and indifference in regard to the laws of logic, and accordingly is extremely useful in active life, but poor and helpless in the expression of the feelings and mental emotions. For this reason it is little adapted for lyric and epic poetry, but all the more so, for the dramatic purposes, for the expression of action and its effects, of the will and its motives, of emotion, desire and passion. This general nature of the language itself, gives the diction of the English drama a dramatic stamp; it never speaks into its own self, but does so always in a lively manner to the objects which are being spoken of; its point is always turned in an outward direction, towards the action, as if, so to speak, it were always about to leap forth into action, to prove the word by the deed; it is thoroughly dialogical; its very monologues resemble discourses between two, the person speaking and his relations to the outer world, his circumstances and conditions, his plans and intentions.

When we consider what an incalculable advantage it is to genius to be led, from the very beginning, to the right path, to find levelled ways, and consequently not to require to squander his best powers in blind attempts and upon false tracks, we must admit that Shakspeare is extremely indebted to his predecessors, the first founders of this general style of the English drama. The old prejudice, which would regard Shakspeare as the solitary point of light in a wide waste of darkness, has, I hope, been in some degree removed by the preceding sketch.

The more we become acquainted with the history of the English stage, the more we are convinced that, in fact, Shakspeare is but a single link in the organic development of a great whole, that he did but complete what others had commenced before him, that he was but the master spirit amid a number of able fellow-labourers who worked with and before him.

Yet, for this very reason, Shakspeare is not only a point, but the culminating and central point in the sphere of the artistic development which he entered. The circumference does certainly determine the centre, but still it can itself be seen and accurately measured only from the centre. In the following Book, therefore, it will be our duty to show how powerfully Shakspeare influenced the formation of the dramatic art of his time, how he spun the given threads into a grand artistic texture, how he not only completed the edifice he found begun, but, at the same time altered it according to a higher standard, how, accordingly, as much light is reflected on his predecessors and contemporaries, as was thrown upon him by them, and consequently how it is that their workings and strivings, their value and importance can be estimated only from the height which he attained.

BOOK II.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SHAKSPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENGLISH NATION UNDER ELIZABETH.

THE age which could give birth to a genius like Shakspeare must also have had the power of producing and maturing so rare a fruit. For every person, and especially every one who figures in the history of the world, is at the same time a creation of universal history, and their birth may be regarded as much a matter of necessity as every great invention. Thus, when the development of the human mind required the magnet, gunpowder, and the art of printing, they were discovered. When, in the course of the world's history, a Luther, Dante, Raphael, Shakspeare, etc., were required, they were born.

The twelve decades from 1480 to 1600 form one of the greatest and richest eras in the history of humanity. The invention of printing (1440) had preceded it in order to furnish the external means, and to be the lever of the great revolution in the wheel of time. In the same way that Columbus discovered a new terrestrial world, Luther's Reformation created a new spiritual world. The arts and sciences of antiquity arose from their long state of lethargy into fresh and vigorous life. It was at this time also that the modern, and peculiarly Christian art, celebrated its greatest triumphs, for this was the age of those great and still unrivalled masters in painting—Leonardo da Vinci, Michel Angelo, Raphael, Titian, Correggio, and Dürer; of

the immortal and unrivalled composers of church music, Palestrina, Giovanni Gabrieli, Orlando Lasso, and others; lastly it was the cradle of the most important of modern poets, Tasso, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderon, Camoens—and above all, of Shakspeare. It may be said that the birth and activity of all these great minds were necessary, in the first place, because the creative power of the century had also to reveal itself in art, and also, because the great ideas of the past and present required to be brought out in an artistic form, secondly, because a check had to be given to the influence of the revival of ancient art and literature, that it might not crush the new formation of Christian art and turn it from its course by false imitations. The spirit of modern art, even though—as afterwards actually happened—it should be momentarily suppressed by the imitation of the antique, would again rise to fresh power and beauty by the study of these great masters, who had grown up on the soil of Christian culture.

Of all the states of Europe it was England especially which, in the sixteenth century, stood forth pre-eminent in greatness and importance. While the others lost more or less in power and influence, there sprang up here, under Queen Elizabeth's fortunate sceptre, a fresh and vigorous life for the nation. The long wars with France, and the equally long civil wars of the Roses, had broken the feudal power of the Middle Ages, established the authority of the sovereign, and thereby given a new form to the political relation between the state and the people. The fact of Henry VIII. joining the Protestant Church gave rise to a mighty movement in religious and ecclesiastical life. The participation in this movement at first degenerated, it is true, into partisanship and mutual persecution; but the sound and vigorous seed once sown among the people might, perhaps, be retarded in its development, but could never be again rooted out, and soon bore the fairest flowers and fruit. The persecutions of Mary the Catholic acted only as a stimulus to greater efforts on the part of Protestantism and it became strengthened rather than weakened; under the fostering reign of Elizabeth, therefore, it again, with fresh vigour, raised its head and crushed its opponent. The extreme contrasts between

Catholics and Puritans found a happy medium in the English Episcopal Church, which corresponded with the conditions and requirements of the time. While the former wished to retain all as it was of old, and the Puritans wanted innovations in everything—in blind fanaticism desiring either to separate Church and state entirely, or to combine them into one republico-theocratical, exclusively religious government, thus destroying all freedom of life in manners, in art and science—the Episcopal Church adopted the most necessary innovations, but at the same time endeavoured to retain as much as possible of the old system.

Elizabeth's and Burleigh's firmness, which was necessary under the existing circumstances, kept the two parties in check, without, however, impeding the new progressive course of things.* The Queen ruled like a perfect autocrat, or, if it be preferred, like a despot; the parliament taking any part in the government, or even a parliamentary opposition, was out of the question. Yet the people were happy under the circumstances; England, to face the sharp oppositions which troubled her from within, and to meet the mighty enemies who threatened her from without, required a strong hand to control the reins of government. And Elizabeth possessed not only a strong, but a fortunate hand. The successful wars in France and the Netherlands for the religious freedom of the Protestant Reformers, the conquests in the West Indies, the new discoveries in remote parts of the globe, the firmer establishment of English dominion in Ireland, the acquisition of a lasting political influence in Scotland, but more especially the great victory over Spain—all this contributed to stimulate the energies of the nation, to turn its attention to great enterprises, and to strengthen the rising consciousness of its power and greatness. It was, however, the triumph over Philip's 'Invincible Armada' that tended to elevate the national sense of self-consciousness and patriotism, to the height of poetical enthusiasm. In seven days the Spanish fleet was reduced to such straits that Medina Sidonia determined upon

* Raumer: *Geschichte Europas seit dem Ende des 15 Jahrh.* ii. 530 ff—J. Lingard: *History of England*, vi. 3 ff—Macaulay, *History of England*, &c. (London, 1860), i. 45 f. 53 f. 60 ff.

a retreat. The fearful storms which finally destroyed and annihilated the greater portion of the ships on their homeward journey along the coast of Scotland, were regarded as a divine interference, which watched and directed the welfare of England. The triumph of the British nation was complete. A general thanksgiving was celebrated throughout the country, and on the 29th of November, Elizabeth, amidst incredible rejoicings, made a triumphal entry into London; the portraits of the British commanders were carried before her, the trophies of victory were hung up in St. Paul's, and the Queen's address and the distribution of the rewards to soldiers and sailors, was followed by a solemn religious service.* Tieck, therefore, very justly draws attention to the fact that this great event also, very considerably influenced the history of art, and that it may have contributed to the development of the loftier spirit which gained possession of dramatic poetry itself.

Successful industry and a very extensive commerce had enormously increased the wealth and prosperity of the country, especially among the middle classes. In Count de Bouillon's report of his embassy to England in 1596, he says, that the lower classes of the people are comparatively very rich, for although they live well, they do so economically and are not by any means oppressed by many taxes, so that towns are rapidly increasing in trade and industry. The Venetian Molino also, in a report concerning England of the year 1607, declares London to be the first city in Europe in regard to size, as well as position, and the number of its inhabitants (of whom there were more than 300,000, and these for the most part citizens, as the nobles almost always resided on their estates in the country), for the city was full of merchants and warehouses of every description of article that could in any way be useful or acceptable, and possessed many beautiful buildings and splendid churches.† The nobility, however, according to Bouillon's statement, were very heavily in debt, in con-

* Raumer, *l.c.*, 588 f.

† Raumer: *Beiträge*, i. 606, 624.—J. A. Froude: *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth*. (London, Parker. Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1861.) Vol. i. p. 18 f. 41 f.

sequence of which merchants frequently gained possession of their estates, and noble ladies often married persons of inferior rank. The cause of this embarrassment, as Bouillon affirms, arose not only from the lavish expenditure on dress and retainers—the latter often including among their number a company of players, generally only a jester or domestic fool*—but more especially the many magnificent fêtes which formed one of the favourite amusements of the aristocracy of those times. Elizabeth herself, although otherwise economical even to meanness, was extremely extravagant in dress and fêtes of every description,† and her visits to the palaces of her nobles and to the provincial towns, involved them in similar extravagances. On these occasions, tournaments, splendid pageants, masques and dances alternated with serious instructive discourses; but even plays, both comedies and tragedies, were rarely wanting.‡ An eye-witness describes one of these fêtes which the Queen gave in the spring of 1581 at her palace of Hampton Court. ‘The central point of attraction was a splendid tournament; scaffolding was erected on both sides and ends of a square, for an extraordinary concourse of spectators. First appeared forty lords and gentlemen in magnificent dresses covered with precious stones, and riding on Spanish or Italian horses richly caparisoned; next followed eight heralds bearing the ensign of England, and four trumpeters in red and yellow velvet. After these came four marshals and judges of the lists, accompanied by many noble persons. Next followed four bands of combatants; first, the followers of the Earl of Arundel, &c. After riding round the ring, with their lances in rest and their visors down, they drew up in a line before the Queen. Hereupon an ancient tower was rolled forward, on which was erected a triple chandelier with flambeaux. Out of a door in the tower a large serpent wound itself, and tried to ascend a tree richly laden with fruit, which

* N. Drake; *Shakspeare and his Times*, etc. London, 1818. T. ii., p. 92 ff. 138 ff.

† Raumer: *Geschichte*, ii., 618.—Lingard, *l.c.*, vi. 415, 418.—Drake, ii. 90 f.

‡ Raumer, *l.c.*, according to Johnston, p. 252; Aikin, ii. 307. Osborn, *Mem. of Elizabeth*, 380.

stood close by. Behind the tower were six eagles skilfully contrived, in the bodies of which musicians and trumpeters were concealed. In the next place two horses appeared, without saddles, and gilded all over, and on each sat a little boy with golden locks, and clothed in flowing robes of silver tissue. Then came a triumphal car, which apparently moved backwards, on which sat the three Sisters of Fate, dragging after them by a golden chain, a noble knight as prisoner. On the following day, when the sword fight took place, there was no want of similar ingenious and fanciful devices.*

The morality of the time was, indeed, not of the strictest order. The relation between the sexes was very light and loose, and had retained the stamp of a chivalrous, sensuous and fanciful gallantry, rather than the serious, religious and moral character which was generally maintained in the Middle Ages, at least in England. Intrigues in love and gallant adventures were regarded as part of the life of a young gentleman. Elizabeth herself, though perhaps, in reality chaste, set an enticing example by her frivolous way of displaying by words and actions the inclinations of her heart. For instance she gave the Earl of Leicester a chamber close to her own sleeping apartment; Hennage, Hatton, Raleigh, Oxford, Blount, Simier and Anjou, were generally regarded as her declared suitors; of her fondness for Essex she subsequently made no secret, after having had him executed for treason; and even at a very advanced age she conferred extraordinary favours upon an Earl of Clanricarde, for no other reason than his great personal beauty.† She seems to have been unable to exist without a lover of this kind, who was half a servant of her Majesty, half a worshipper of her beauty. Courtiers and all who approached her tried to outrival one another in gallantries and flatteries, in order to gratify this weakness of her mind, heart, and excessive vanity. The whole court imitated the example set by the Queen, and it cannot cause surprise that strict moralists, like Faunt and Harrington, called the Court a place 'where every enormity

* Raumer: *Briefe aus Paris zur Erläut. der Gesch. des 16 und 17 Jahrhunderts*, etc., ii. 500 f., 504.

† Lingard, *l.c.*, vi. 633.—Raumer: *Beiträge*, 610, 614.

prevailed, where there was little godliness or practise of religion, where in general the most licentious habits and evil conversation were to be met with, and where there was no love but that of the wanton god Asmodeno.* That the nation should to some extent follow the example set by the court, may at once be supposed; Molino expressly charges the English people with intemperance and gluttony. The vice of drunkenness, especially, seems to have been rather general.†

However reprehensible all this is, still it cannot be denied that this kind of festive luxuriousness and the freedom of manners in a youthful, vigorous age, necessarily invested life with a poetical halo, which could not but encourage the development of poetry. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the extreme licence of the court had its antidote in the dull severity of the Puritans, and that, as sharp contrasts in history always find their adjustment, it may be assumed that in general the middle classes, at least, were sound in heart and maintained the right medium between the frivolity of the court and the Pharisaism of the Puritans.

However, the Queen did more than merely give fêtes and devote herself to luxury in dress and love; she was at the same time an accomplished lady, and patronised art and science from the lively interest she herself felt in them. How much poetry, especially, advanced during Elizabeth's reign, is evident from what has already been said in our first Book. We are astounded at the great number of poetical productions, and the no less numerous dramas that appeared, during Shakspeare's time, in every branch of poetry, and we cannot but agree with laborious Drake‡ who enumerates them all, in regarding the fifty-two years, between 1564 and 1616 as the most prolific period in English literature. This redundant wealth, more particularly in the domain of dramatic poetry, is very simply explained by the general fondness of the nation for dramatic plays, which, as Froude§ says, were the principal amusements of Englishmen in the sixteenth century from the palace to the cottage. Still Elizabeth contributed her

* Birch, i., 39, 25.—*l.c.*

† Drake, ii. 124, 128 f.

‡ I., 601 ff.

, 166.—Lingard, *l.c.*

§ *l.c.*, i. 43.

share in encouraging art and philosophy, for although she did not exactly spend large sums in patronising them, still she possessed what was better and more effective—a cultivated taste and a genuine love especially for music and poetry. She played extremely well on the harpsichord, sang to the guitar, made translations, from Horace and other classic authors, and tried her own powers of composition in some lyrical pieces which, it is impossible to deny, possess a certain grace and poetical elevation.* That courtiers, nobles, and people, vied with her in these accomplishments, needs no proof after what has been said above, and will be still more evident from what is to follow. But even *philosophy* was held in high estimation and even encouraged as far as the practical rather than contemplative spirit of the age permitted; for with the Reformation, a new dawn had broken upon it. Petruccio Ubaldini of Florence, writes of England as early as the year 1551: ‘Those who have the means, let their sons and daughters study and learn Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, for since the storm of heresy first burst over the land, it has been considered useful to read the Scriptures in the original. Poorer persons who are unable to give their children a learned education, are nevertheless anxious not to appear ignorant and altogether wanting in the refinement of life.’†

The name of Lord Bacon, who justly stands at the head of modern science and philosophy, alone proves that men soon no longer devoted themselves only to religious interests, but that with devoted zeal, and urged on by the spirit of philosophy, they entered its service for its own sake. Bacon is by no means the only one, but the best known representative of that free scientific enquiry, which from the time of the Reformation began to extend into every province of intellectual life, and thus forms the beginning of a new period of culture in which the human mind endeavoured, by means of the power of enquiring thought, to fathom the laws of all existence in nature and history, in religion and morality, in art and

* Raumer: *Geschichte*, ii. 616 f.—Lingard, *l.c.*, vi., according to Camden, p. 736; Keralio, v. 464; Andrews, i. 107, 204; Lodge, ii. 41, iii. 148; Sydney papers, i. 373, 375, ii. 262.

† Raumer: *Briefe aus Par.s, &c.*, ii. 70.

science, and tried to discover truths in the depth of its consciousness of self and of the universe. This new principle of life burst forth, with irresistible power, in all branches of knowledge, theology not excepted. The controversies between Catholics and Protestants, Puritans, and the members of the Episcopal Church, embraced the whole, many-branched tree of religious knowledge, and was fought out with the sword of religious enthusiasm, as well as with the knife of critical acumen, both in the sphere of faith and in that of knowledge. Stimulated by Lord Bacon, Edward Herbert, Earl Cherbury (born in 1581, died 1648) endeavoured to determine the nature of truth in religion and ethics; John Barclay, in his '*Icon animorum*' (London, 1614), attempted to develop a science of psychology, and in his *Argenis* (Paris, 1621), a form of government and policy, in accordance with the spirit of the new philosophical principle. William Gilbert (died in 1603) endeavoured to comprise the whole doctrine of physics in a new system based upon the principle of magnetic attraction. John Napier (died in 1618), and Thomas Harriot (died 1621), were both distinguished in mathematical science, the one by the invention of logarithms, the other by the improvement of algebra. These clear thinkers stood, as it were, in contrast, to Robert Fludd, the mystic (b. 1574, d. 1635), with his extensive learning and the depth of his theosophical intuitions, and to Kenelm Digby and others. But the study of antiquity, in particular, was cultivated with a new and hitherto unparelled zeal.* By this means and the increasing literary and mercantile intercourse of nations, a certain halo and learned culture was diffused over all the domains of life.

Here also Elizabeth led the way by her example. She spoke three foreign languages (Spanish, French, and Italian), had read a great deal, and was not only very well acquainted with the actual state and circumstances of her own and of the neighbouring kingdoms, but, as Bouillon expressly remarks, she also knew something about history and philosophy.† That she did not stand quite alone in the possession of these accomplishments, although she may

* Drake. i. 448 f.

† Raumer, *l.c.*, *Beiträge*, i. 607.—Lingard, *l.c.*, vi.

have been superior to most, admits of no doubt. How widely, for instance, a knowledge of classical antiquity, and particularly of poetry and mythology, was diffused—superficially in most cases it is true—through all classes of the people, from the highest to the lowest, is proved by the many historically authenticated features, which at the same time reflect the spirit of the age. Elizabeth herself not only spoke Latin, but understood Greek; Roger Ascham, her teacher, praises her great progress in this difficult language, and affirms that, during a long sojourn at Windsor, she read more Greek in one day than a canon of the Royal Chapel would read Latin in a whole week, nay, even in her sixty-fifth year, she translated Plutarch's *Treatise on Curiosity*.^{*} Her successor, James I., shared her fondness for books and literary occupation, and whatever may have been his faults and weaknesses, he possessed a highly cultivated mind, could lay claim to great theological learning, and was apparently not without a taste for art.[†] Hence, conversation in Shakspeare's time was full of allusions, quotations and illustrations from ancient history, poetry and mythology—this is evident from the dramas of Lilly, Peele, Greene, Marlowe, and from the whole literature of the period—and the daughters of the nobility and all who claimed to have had a good education, were, therefore, carefully instructed in Latin and Greek. At court, ancient myths and stories were frequently the subjects of scenic representations on festive days. I need only remind the reader of Edward's 'Damon and Pythias,' of Lilly's 'Midas,' or of Peele's 'Arraignment of Paris.' When the Queen honoured any of the grandees of her kingdom with a visit, she was welcomed on the threshold by the Penates, received by Mercury, and conducted by him to her apartments. In the pleasure grounds the lakes were ornamented with Tritons and Nereids; wood-nymphs (pages in disguise) animated the thickets, while servants, in the garb of satyrs, skipped about ready to perform her Majesty's commands.[‡] When in the morning the Queen left her apartments, which were hung with pictures in tapestry

^{*} Raumer: *Geschichte*, l.c.

[†] Drake, i. 434.—Beaumont in Raumer, *Briefe*, ii. 245 f.

[‡] For instance at the famous festival at Kenilworth. Warton, l.c.

from the *Æneid*, she was received by Diana, who invited the maiden queen to hunt in her own preserves, where no Actæon would be likely to offend her modesty, &c. Similar pageants were exhibited in the towns which Elizabeth visited or passed through on her journeys. In Norwich, for instance, she was welcomed by a number of the gods, who, in order to do her homage, had descended from Olympus; at their head was Cupid, who presented her with a golden arrow, the sharpest in his quiver and which, if only shot by her irresistible beauty, would pierce a heart of adamant. Even the confectioners and pastrycooks were acquainted with their Ovid and Virgil; their tables glittered with plastic sugar works, some representing important metamorphoses, and the national plumcake was frequently ornamented with a relief in sugar, representing the siege of Troy.*

After what has been said, it cannot appear strange that even in the middle ranks of society and among the burghers we find that both men and women were acquainted with classical phrases and mythological names, &c., which if not learnt directly from translations of the ancient authors, were at all events caught up from the conversation of the higher classes. It is therefore by no means a mistake in Shakspeare (as would seem to be the case nowadays) when, in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' Mistress Page—a dame not over highly educated—answers Falstaff's declaration of love with a mythological simile. On the contrary, we have here again reason to admire his fine tact, he soon felt that these far-fetched images and allusions—although patronised by a passing humour of fashion—could only have a disturbing effect, like a tasteless ornament, hence in his maturer works they are less frequently met with.

No doubt both society and the whole intellectual culture of the nation gained something in beauty of form and grace of movement by this wide-spread familiarity with the poetical flowers of classical literature. This was, in

Drake, i, 39 f according to Gascoigne: *Princelie Pleasures at Kenilworth* and *Laneham's Letters*. Both were present, and a masque was arranged by Gascoigne.

* Warton, *l.c.*

fact, one of the advantages that arose from it, any evil tendency was obviated from the independent and original vigour of the imagination, which, at this period, held possession of the English mind. In spite of this fashionable bias, the true nature of the English people could not be turned aside from its path. Its attachment to antique culture served merely as a kind of sportive play, which enriched the intellectual and poetical character of life, enlarged the stock of knowledge, and exercised wit and critical power, without being able to take possession of the actual centre, of the intellectual development of the nation. The English, in all essential points, remained faithful to their old popular customs, habits, and institutions; practical life was but little if at all affected by the admiration of antiquity, and even the drama pursued, as we have seen, its own peculiar course of development, in which it accepted the antique tendency only as a single motive.

In spite, therefore, of the wide-spread familiarity with the myths of classical antiquity, the minds of the people clung to the significant views contained in the ancient tales and legends of their northern ancestors. The world of spirits, elves, and fairies, magic and witchcraft, astrology, and alchemy, necromancy, and all the secret arts and sciences of the Middle Ages, still continued to exist, in the popular belief, and fed the imagination with peculiar images. The people were fond of whiling away the tedium of the long winter evenings with marvellous stories of magicians and fairies, of giants and dwarfs, of spirits and spectral apparitions. On certain days of the year, this belief in signs, omens and prophesies, gave rise to all kinds of strange ceremonies. It was believed, for instance, that on Midsummer's night, the air was thronged with magicians and their ministering spirits, and that they fought among one another; it was also believed that certain herbs, gathered at a particular hour of this night, possessed miraculous virtues, &c. The feast of Michaelmas revived the ancient belief in good and bad angels, who conducted men through life;* other special influences were attributed to the anniversaries of St. Mark, St. Valentine, All

* See Shakspeare's *Henry VI.*, 2nd part, i. 2, ii. 4; *Antony and Cleopatra*, ii. 3; and *Macbeth*

Saints' and other days.* These relics of mediæval fancy, which acquired fresh life and consideration from the superstitious King James I., and also from the noble and educated persons who lived during his reign, Shakspeare, with his usual felicity and profound skill, has made use of and poetically idealised in his 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth,' in his 'Tempest' and 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'

Chivalry, also—that peculiar blossom on the mediæval tree of life, which was chiefly nourished by the perfume of romanticism, but no longer of any political importance, and in many respects degenerated—still continued in its old principles of honour and devotion to the female sex, in its poetical forms, customs, and behaviour of society, and thus perpetually recalled the Middle Ages. It was not merely on extraordinary occasions, such as the visit of Christian IV. of Denmark to James I., that tournaments and contests of various kinds were held, these took place almost regularly every year.† The dress of the day, although constantly changing and often tasteless and extravagant, but always splendid, fantastic and of the brightest colours, and chiefly made of silk and velvet, embroidered with gold and silver, pearls and precious stones,‡ was nevertheless, in its principal features, the picturesque attire of the Middle Ages. In the same way, tales of chivalry, old romances and ballads, were the general and favourite form of reading (to which in the Elizabethan period, with its stories by Greene, Lodge, and others, were added other kindred elements); likewise the legends of King Arthur, of Haimon and Charles the Great, of Huon of Bordeaux, of Amadis de Gaul, the Knight of the Sun, the Seven Champions, Palmerin de Oliva, Bevyss of Hampton, Sir Eglamour, Sir Tryamour, Lamwell, Isenbras, of Friar Rous, of Howleglas, Gargantua. Robin Hood, &c., &c.,§ as well as the epic poems of Bojardo, Ariosto, and Tasso, cherished and kept alive the

* Drake, i. 316 ff., ii. 154, 302 f. 474 f.

† Report of the French ambassador, Count Beaumont, of the 12th of August, 1606, in Raumer: *Briefe aus Paris*, ii. 271 f. Fuller particulars in Drake, i. 553, 555 f.

‡ Further details in Drake, ii. 87–111.

§ Drake, i. 519 ff.

romantic taste, which was stimulated to cheerful games and jests, by the merry tales of Boccaccio, Bandello and other Italian and Spanish novelists.*

The same free poetical licence with which all life was treated, was also employed in blending the forms of chivalry with the civic customs and court etiquette of modern times, and in combining the credulous mind and the fantastic culture of the Middle Ages, with the modern realistic tendency; accordingly it was not thought inconsistent to bring the characters of the northern sagas and legends into direct connection with the gods and mythical personages of classical antiquity. Thus, in Shakspeare, Ariel assumes the form of a Greek water nymph, Theseus and Hippolyta play in the same piece together with Oberon and Titania; Hecate presides over the sorceries of the witches in 'Macbeth;' and on the occasion of the festival at Kenilworth the Lady of the Lake associated with the train of Neptune and his classical water divinities. The personages in both of these domains of thought were merely poetical images, but possessed an equal degree of reality in the belief and the imagination of the people; they had not, as yet, been dissected by prosaic criticism and reduced to mere abstractions. As primarily these figures owed their origin to a naïve conception of nature, to the perception of a natural sense, and to a still untutored fancy, so at that time they were still accepted and preserved in the minds of the people with perfect simplicity. The people sympathised with them, and allowed their imagination to play in and about ideas of this kind; but they did so perhaps more with a cheerful, poetical playfulness, than with the religious seriousness in which they were originally conceived. The whole mental culture of the age was not yet treated in the spirit of prosaic philological learning, if we may so speak, like an orthopædic Procrustes bed, but more like a beautiful, variegated ornament, which set off, enlivened and in-

* That these were very much read in the original and gradually became generally known through translations, is evident even from the many dramatic forms in which they appeared. Moreover, many of Shakspeare's comedies and one or two of his tragedies are borrowed from these sources. Drake, i. 451 f. 541 f.

vigorated the mind without impeding or confining its freedom of flight; in fact, the whole culture was, in general, still more of an artistic and poetical than of a philosophic character.

The same fantastic and poetical feeling which, as we have seen, still induced the nobles and grandes of the nation to celebrate their festive gatherings in the style of the Middle Ages, and to embellish them with appropriate and kindred forms of art, also affected the people in the celebration of their old national feasts and holidays. On New Year's Eve, for instance, it was the custom for youths and maidens to exchange dresses and so disguised to perambulate the village with dances and songs. Twelfth Night was celebrated at court and by the aristocracy with exhibitions of splendid masques and lotteries, &c., by the people, with pastimes and mummings of every kind. Shrove Tuesday, however, was especially devoted to theatrical representations of every description; on this day town and country, high and low, were determined to have some sort of pageant. On May-day—amid festive processions and bands of music—every town and village erected its lofty May-pole, adorned with flags and banners, streamers and garlands, and the young of both sexes danced merrily round it. The most beautiful and virtuous maiden was chosen as Queen of the May, to preside over the festival, and to dance the Morris dance with the clown, a piper and four or five Morris dancers, bedecked with shells, ribbons and scarfs, etc.; this Morris dance was perhaps an imitation of the Spanish Morisco, perhaps, however, an old Anglo-Saxon festive dance.* Sometimes in place of this dance, they had Robin Hood as King of the May, and Maid Marion as Queen,† surrounded by a merry band of fantas-

* Tschischwitz considers it to be Anglo-Saxon, for he derives the word *morris* from the Anglo-Saxon *merid*, now *mirth*. (*Nachklänge germanischer Mythen in den Werken Shakspeare's, Programm der Hallischen Real-Schule*, 1865, p. 52.)

† This popular English hero, whom the national poetry of the day celebrates in such various ways and mentions at every opportunity, was, according to recent historical investigations (Thierry: *Histoire de la Conquête de l'Angleterre*, Paris, 1854), a so-called outlaw, who had taken part in the rebellion of the barons and of the people under Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, against Henry III., who favoured

tically disguised men, to represent other popular characters celebrated in song and legend, such as Friar Tuck, Little John the Dragon, the Hobby Horse, &c. Matches at cross-bow and dancing usually ended the day. A portion of these festivities, particularly the favourite Morris dance, was repeated at Whitsuntide, under the direction of the 'Lord of the Whitsun-ale,' and connected with dramatic plays (Whitsun-plays). The first Monday after Whitsun week, was the feast of sheep-shearing, and was spent amid similar amusements. At the Harvest Home all distinctions between master and servant, mistress and maid were laid aside, all mixed together in unrestrained merriment, every one did as he pleased. In winter, again, St. Martin's day (the time for curing meats and the feast of the vintage), but especially Christmas day, were celebrated with songs and dances, plays and mummings, &c.* Every season, accordingly, had one or more such festival. Even the anniversary of the consecration of churches, annual fairs, weddings, &c., were not allowed to pass without dances, games and theatrical performances.† In the interval between holiday and festival, there were again all kinds of additional popular amusements; a very favourite one was that of bear-baiting (which Shakspeare mentions in his 'Merry Wives of Windsor'), for which a large circular building was expressly erected in the Paris Garden in London. Cock-fighting also, and dog-fighting, which Shakspeare likewise alludes to in the same piece, were more general and popular amusements than at the present day. Racing, hunting, hawking, fishing and athletic games of every description,‡ more especially shooting with the long and cross-bow, were frequently practised, and attracted great numbers of spectators. Moreover, gipsies, boxers, tumblers and dancers, minstrels and ballad singers wandered about the country, exhibiting their arts. Above all, there were the bands of strolling players,

foreigners, and who, after the victory of the king's party at Eversham in 1265, was obliged to conceal himself, and lived for some time as a highwayman in the forest of Barnsdale. Who he was, or what became of him, is not known.

* Drake, i. 124-208.

† Ibid., i. 210 ff.

‡ Such as the Games at Cotswood.—Drake, i. 252 ff.

welcome alike in towns, villages and at the residences of the great; they usually arrived uninvited, offered their services and were employed in various ways,* a custom of which Shakspeare has availed himself in his 'Hamlet,' and 'The Taming of the Shrew.' Merry Old England was, in fact, still in its prime.

It is evident from what has just been said, that the fantastic and poetical spirit of the Middle Ages, still influenced everything in the life of those times, and yet that it was the beginning of an entirely opposite mental tendency. Shakspeare, in fact, stood on the boundary of two great periods; on the one hand the poet was taking leave of the decaying, but—as a ruin—the more poetic greatness and splendour of the Middle Ages; of the bold structure of the subdivided state of feudalism which demanded and encouraged personal independence, power and energy; of the still unbroken imperiousness, majesty and glory of the once all-powerful Church; of chivalry and monasticism, with its significant and imaginative character; of the self-sufficiency of the laborious and peaceful, but yet powerful and solid burgher class; of the wealth of a highly advanced and profound state of art which united heaven and earth. On the other hand he was welcomed by the future, the dazzling majesty of an absolute monarchy which concentrated everything in itself; by a new Church, which was established upon the power of the intellect and the testimony of conscience, and by the inspiration of a re-animated faith; by the more refined culture of an aristocracy which had become gallant, luxurious, and courtly; by the growing importance of the free aspirations of the burgher-class; but above all by the power of science, the irresistible force of a new intellectual tendency, led on by the searching spirit of philosophical enquiry. With one foot Shakspeare stood in the domain of a past, in which everything—shut up within the numerous social circles, and rounded off into independent bodies—had acquired a definite and inviolable shape, in which mind and life exhibited themselves altogether objectively, under fixed, though pregnant forms, and in which, consequently, the authority of generally recognised forces, the power of tradition, and the right of the

* Drake, i. 247, 556 f.

existant controlled and checked the minds of men. With the other foot he touched the domain of a future, in which the awaking power of the people, more particularly of the Germanic nations which—alarmed at the narrow formalism, at the thoughtless outwardness, the intellectual oppression and the decline of morality, to which the one-sided and prevailing tendency had led, and rebelling against the slavish subjection into which they had fallen—began to question the right of the existing, and thus, by enquiring and testing, to place themselves above authority, and to vindicate the divine privilege of free self-determination and independent knowledge, the imperishable right of self-renovation in progressive culture and civilisation, the power of reflection and criticism;* in other words, Shakspeare was close upon a future in which the *subjectivity* of the mind began to reign.

The gradual decay of the former tendency, and the growing supremacy of the latter, were the necessary results of the Reformation, for it had given rise to both. However, with the Reformation, that is, after the Church—the basis of mediæval existence—had decayed, the whole building which was raised upon it, inevitably collapsed also. The Middle Ages were coming to a close, and the modern era was beginning. Both, however, the former in its exit, the latter in its advent, were still almost equally vigorous in Shakspeare's days. In his poetry they are both equally present, and in the following chapters it is my intention to show more in detail, that in his poetic view of life, the romantic Middle Ages with their wealth of sentiment and imagination, their youthful and idealistic strivings, their natural and sensuous freshness and fulness of power, together with the free, variable, searching, investigating, and reflecting mind of modern times—which is clothed in all possible forms and colours of subjective and characteristic peculiarity—appear combined and blended into an organic unity.

* How cutting the spirit of criticism was even in Shakspeare's day and how it attacked everything, Drake, i. 456, has shown by several striking examples.

CHAPTER II.

THE EARLY YEARS OF SHAKSPEARE.*

ENGLAND'S greatest poet was not born in London, nor in any of the larger towns, but in the small country town of Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire. He did not belong to the higher and more educated ranks, for his family was probably one of that, in most cases, well-to-do class of artisans and farmers—whose name, sometimes spelt Shaxper or Shakspere, sometimes Shakspeare or Shakespeare†—which,

* The actual substance of the following biography of the poet, except where special authorities are referred to, is founded upon *J. O. Halliwell's* 'Life of William Shakespeare, including many Particulars,' &c. London, 1848; also his 'Illustrations of the Life of Shakespeare' London, 1874. *J. P. Collier's* 'Life of William Shakespeare,' in his edition of Shakspeare's works, London, 1858, vol. i., and upon *A. Dyce*, 'Some Account of the Life of Shakespeare,' in the second edition of his Shakspeare, vol. i., London, 1864. In Halliwell and Dyce the reader will find accurate and complete copies of all the deeds and documents referring to the life of Shakespeare. *S. W. Fulford's* 'History of W. Shakespeare, Player and Poet,' etc., although already in its second edition, (London, 1864), is not so much a biography as it is a tissue of conjectures and poetical embellishments, such as probably a novelist would warp round the skeleton of historical facts and traditions.

† The poet's will is not written in his own handwriting, but is signed by him in three different places in perfectly distinct characters. His signature is also affixed to the contract of purchase for the house within the precincts of Blackfriars; in both cases he clearly and distinctly signs himself "Shakspeare," as any one may see from the *Memorials of Shakspeare*, by W. Staunton (London, Day, 1864), which contains a lithograph of the two documents. I do not consider it justifiable to differ from this authentic spelling of the poet's name. The reasons which have been adduced against the poet's own signature 'Shakspeare' instead of the now customary spelling 'Shakespeare,' are chiefly founded upon the title pages of the old quartos and folios, which (with one exception) give the disputed *e*, and also upon the circumstance, that the literary contemporaries of the poet, also invariably write the name Shakespeare. It has also been supposed that the form 'Shakspeare' is merely a 'Warwickshire provincialism.' I must say that this 'important' reason appears to me very unimportant. For Shak-

as early as the reign of Henry VI., were pretty widely spread over the woodlands of the county. According to the general supposition he was born on the 23rd of April 1564*. His father, whose Christian name was John, was probably the son of one Richard Shakspeare, a wealthy farmer in Smitterfield, near Stratford, and a tenant of Robert Arden, whose daughter John Shakspeare married. In 1552, we find him settled in Stratford, and that in 1556 he there carried on the business of a glover can now scarcely be doubted, since the recent discovery of some old documents. At the same time, however, he applied himself to farming, and appears subsequently (before 1579) to have devoted himself entirely to this pursuit. As a farmer he may have bred sheep and cattle, and have occasionally killed some, and sold the flesh and wool, which is perhaps the origin of the tradition that Shakspeare's father, as Aubrey says, was a butcher, and according to Rowe a dealer in wool. It may be that he gave up his business as glover, in consequence of his marriage with Mary Arden, in 1557, who brought him as dowry the small estate of Ashbies (in Wilmecote near Stratford), together with the estate of Smitterfield. For his father-in-law, Robert Arden, was likewise a rich husbandman, but did not, as hitherto supposed, belong to

speare was no doubt quite well aware that *to shake* was spelt with an *e*, and this is evidently the reason why the writers and printers of this time adopted the *e*. Shakspeare therefore no doubt had good reasons for nevertheless writing *Shakspeare*—perhaps only in order, by this provincialism, to indicate his Warwickshire origin. But even supposing that out of pure obstinacy and caprice he banished the *e* from his name—and who would deny him the right to do so—it certainly, in my opinion, is contrary to the feeling of loyalty due to the great poet, who gave his name a world-wide renown, to presume to write it differently from what he himself has done.

* According to the Church register of Stratford he was baptised on the 26th of April; that he was born on the 23rd is only probable, as it was then customary to baptise children on the third day after birth. It has been argued that this supposition contradicts the inscription on his tombstone in Stratford, according to which he died on the 23rd of April, 1616, in the 53rd year of his age. For if he had died in 1616 on his birthday, he would have been fifty-two years old (*Notes and Queries*, vol. vii., p. 337). This objection merely strengthens the possibility that Shakspeare's birthday was not the 23rd, but an earlier date.

the wealthy, distinguished family of Arden, who ranked among the gentry of the county, resided at Park Hall in the diocese of Curdworth, and, as early as the reign of Henry VII., played a conspicuous part in the county.

From these notices we may safely infer that Shakspeare's father, although not a rich nor an educated man—he could not even write—was, nevertheless, at the beginning of his career in good circumstances, more especially as it is quite certain that, in addition to his landed estates, he also acquired, as early as 1556, the heritable lease of a house, and subsequently, in 1570–1575, another piece of land in the town of Stratford—two freehold houses in Henley Street, where he himself lived after 1552. Further, that he was a person of some consideration among his fellow citizens, is evident from the fact that he was successively appointed to the petty honorary offices of Ale-Taster, Burgess, Constable, Afferor, Chamberlain and Alderman, which the town could confer upon him, until in 1568 he was made High Bailiff, and in 1571 chief Alderman.

However, before the year 1578 his worldly circumstances must have received a great shock, for in that year he was obliged partly to mortgage, partly to sell his landed property; the two houses in Stratford, however, remained in his possession. In 1579, the weekly contribution which every alderman had to pay for the support of the poor of the town, was specially remitted in his favour; in 1587 he seems to have been arrested for debt, and as late as 1592—when he was accused by the eight commissioners sent to Warwickshire by the Queen to inform against Jesuits, priests and the so-called recusants—his reason for not having attended church once a month as prescribed, was that he kept away from fear of being arrested for debt. About 1596, in which year he was granted the use of a coat of arms by the College of Heralds, his worldly circumstances seem again to have improved; at least, in 1597 he instituted a law-suit against one John Lambert in order to regain possession of the mortgaged estate of Ashbies. A few years later, in 1601, he died, while his wife lived to see the time of her son's highest celebrity; she died in 1608.

John Shakspeare's large family of eight children no doubt contributed to increase the difficulties of his position after 1578. That under the circumstances, William, the eldest of the four sons, cannot have received a good, much less a learned education, is self-evident. He may have learned the little Latin of which Ben Jonson speaks, in the Free Grammar School of Stratford, but probably, soon after he had completed his twelfth year, all further development of his mind by teaching and instruction ceased. It is very possible that, as has been conjectured, he was present, as a spectator, at the celebrated festival which Lord Leicester gave in honour of the Queen's visit to Kenilworth in 1575, for Kenilworth is only fourteen miles from Stratford. However, apart from the fact that the supposition is very feebly supported, such festivals can but little, if at all, have contributed to the development of his mind. On the other hand, it is very probable that, as tradition goes, he was obliged at an early age to assist his father in his business, whether as a farmer, butcher, or as dealer in wool; it may also be, as Aubrey informs us from the mouth of a certain Mr. Beeston (a well-known name in the theatrical world of Shakspeare's day), that for a time he was a schoolmaster.

Of the history of Shakspeare's youth nothing is known with any certainty except that, as an extant document proves, the Bishop of Worcester, on the 28th of November, 1582, granted him a license to marry 'Anne Hathaway' of Stratford, after the banns had been published but once. Anne was the daughter of Richard Hathaway, a wealthy farmer of Schottery, in the diocese of Stratford, and according to the inscription on the brass plate over her grave, was eight years older than Shakspeare. The marriage no doubt took place immediately after the issue of the license, and the request to have the banns proclaimed but once is explained by the fact that as early as May, 1583, the young husband of nineteen years was presented with his first child. It was a daughter, who at her baptism on the 26th of May received the name of Susanna. Evidently, therefore, the reason for his speedy marriage at such an early age with so much older a girl, was a youthful indiscretion, which, even while it throws a

far greater reproach upon the girl, also casts a shadow upon Shakspeare's young days.* If we consider how unfortunate was the outward position in which he was placed, how heavily this may have weighed upon his spirits, how ardently he longed to unfold the pinions of his mind, and how much wealth of imagination, of mind and passion were his by nature, it cannot be wondered that, as it seems, in his youth he indulged in irregularities and excesses, such as are unjustifiable in face of the laws of strict morality. Hence it is very possible that he did not stop with the indiscretion which led to his early marriage and must necessarily have aggravated his position. This first indiscretion speaks in some degree rather in favour of the traditional supposition, which accuses him of a second misdemeanour. Rowe and Oldys, who, at the end of the seventeenth century collected traditions about Shakspeare, current in Stratford, report, from mere traditional but from different and yet unanimous sources, that some wild young men of his acquaintance had frequently tempted him to the offence of deer-stealing. The stolen game belonged to a country gentleman, Sir Thomas Lucy of Chalcote, near Stratford.† Shakspeare was caught, taken to account and, as he thought, punished too severely for a transgression which, in those days, was considered 'a venial frolic;' he revenged himself by posting a pasquinade on Sir Thomas's park-gates. One stanza of this lampoon has been preserved by tradition, and has some claim upon being regarded as genuine, as it is found in different, yet

* From this motive of Shakspeare's marriage, as also from his will, in which he leaves his wife only his 'second best bed,' and from some passages in his dramas (for instance, in *As You Like It*, ii. 4) in which, with a certain emphasis, he warns men not to take a wife older than themselves, it has been concluded that Shakspeare's marriage cannot have been a happy one. These facts are evidently not sufficient to establish the conclusion, especially as Shakspeare's landed property, as Ch. Knight has pointed out, was chiefly freehold, and his wife was legally entitled to a not inconsiderable dower. However, the supposition is nevertheless not improbable, if it be remembered that Shakspeare subsequently lived for many years in London, separated from his wife.

† Malone, it is true, has endeavoured to prove that Sir Thomas did not possess a deer park. But as his son and heir in 1602 sent Lord Ellesmere the present of a buck, he seems to have kept deer, even though he had no park. Dyce, p. 36.

unanimous sources.* This in all probability is the oldest extant specimen of Shakspeare's poetry, and although it indulges rather much in invectives, and is, accordingly, not exactly distinguished by Attic refinement, still it is sufficiently sharp and witty, and betrays, in regard to form, so much ease and volubility, that it does no discredit to the youthful Shakspeare.

Tradition connects this story with Shakspeare's removal from Stratford to London. Sir Thomas Lucy is said to have doubled his persecutions on account of the mischievous pasquinade, and thereby to have obliged Shakspeare to seek refuge in the metropolis. Even this result of the first production of his Muse, is not unlikely under the given circumstances, and if this was the result, then the first achievement of his poetical activity was a most fortunate one. For in Stratford his poetic genius, like Pegasus at the plough, would probably have been crippled, in London it developed; we cannot conceive a Shakspeare without London and the London stage. On the other hand, however, there is no need of extraordinary events and motives to explain Shakspeare's determination to go to London. For at the beginning of the year 1585 his wife had presented him with twins, a son and a daughter, who, at their baptism, on the 2nd of February, received the names of Hamnet and Judith (probably so called after the sponsors, the baker Hamnet Sadler and his wife). This addition to his family would naturally increase the difficulties of providing the means of living, with which he in all probability had to struggle. Accordingly, when we consider the glaring incongruity between his outward and inner life, between the pressure of his external position, the

* The following is the form in which it has come down to us:—

"A parliament member, a justice of peace,
At home a poor scarecrowe, at London an asse;
If lowsie be Lucy, as some volke miscalle it,
Then Lucy is lowsie whatever befall it:
 He thinks himself greate,
 Yet an asse in his state
We allowe by his eare but with asses to mate.
If Lucy is lowsie, as some volke miscalle it,
Sing lowsie Lucy, whatever befall it."

upward striving of his mind, and his poetical vocation, and if we further recollect how often the town of Stratford, since 1569, had been visited by companies of players, who had there exhibited their arts, and how powerfully this must have affected Shakspeare's imagination, and his doubtless innate pleasure and fondness for the drama—then his journey to London will appear as natural a proceeding as Schiller's flight from Stuttgart to Mannheim. I call it his journey to London, for possibly, it was not originally his intention to settle in London permanently; otherwise he would have taken his wife and children with him. It is very likely that he at first, merely wished to see whether he could find, in the metropolis, a means of improving his embarrassed position, and that it was merely owing to circumstances that, year by year, he was kept in London, although perhaps he always regarded Stratford as his actual home, and continually cherished the hope of returning thither as soon as possible. This supposition is supported, at all events, by the fact that he did not bring his family to London, and merely visited them in Stratford once or several times a year, and that, at an early date, he employed the money, which gradually began to come in plentifully, in purchasing landed property in his native town.

It is impossible to fix with certainty the precise year of Shakspeare's arrival in London, the year which forms the commencement of a new era in dramatic art. The general supposition which favours the year 1586, is supported only by the probability that Shakspeare very likely still lived in Stratford when his twin-children were born, and that, on the other hand, one of his earliest plays, 'Titus Andronicus'—according to the testimony of Ben Jonson—was performed as early as 1587-88, and received with decided approbation.

According to a document which J. P. Collier claims to have discovered among the papers of Lord Ellesmere's family archives at Bridgewater (a petition of the Lord Chamberlain's company of players to the Queen's Privy Council), Shakspeare, as early as 1589, became a 'sharer' or shareholder of the company, that is, by investing capital had acquired a proportionate share in the movable and im-

movable property, as well as a share in the income of the company. This document, however, has for good reasons been declared a forgery.* This much only may be asserted with sufficient certainty, that Shakspeare soon after his arrival in London placed himself in connection with one of the companies of players, probably with the already mentioned Lord Chamberlain's company, of which he was a member down to the end of his career in London; at first perhaps working with and for it in some subordinate position, subsequently as player and theatrical poet.†

The first certain evidence of Shakspeare's connection with the Lord Chamberlain's company has, however, only recently been discovered by Halliwell, in a 'Memorandum in the Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber,' according to which Will Kempe, W. Shakspeare and Richard Burbage, upon direction from the Council *de dato* March 15th, 1594, received "xx li.," for two comedies or interludes which were performed before the Queen. As Shakspeare is here named second, as the representative of the Lord Chamberlain's company, it may be presumed that, even at that time, he must have been one of its leading members. A 'sharer' however he never seems to have been; for in a second document an 'affidavit,' also recently discovered by Halliwell, the sons of James Burbage tell us that after relinquishing their theatrical speculations in Shoreditch, they built the 'Globe with summes of money taken up at interest, which lay heavy on us many yeares, and to ourselves wee joyned those deserving men Shakspeare, Hemings, Condall, Phillips and others, partners in the profittes of that they call the House.' As to Blackfriars they say: 'Our father purchased it at extreame rates and made it into a playhouse with great charge and trouble, which after was leased out to one Evans that first

* C. M. Ingleby: *A Complete View of the Shakspeare Controversy, concerning the Authenticity, &c.* London, 1861, pp. 243 f. 249 f.

† The story which reports that Shakspeare at first used to hold the horses of the young cavaliers at the playhouses, is a tradition which did not appear till 1743, and is one which Rowe is indeed said to have known, but which he does not mention in his life of Shakspeare, and which is therefore no doubt devoid of all foundation and probability.

sett up the boys commonly called the Queene's Majesties Children of the Chapel.—In processe of time, the boyes growing up to bee men, it was considered that house would be as fitt for ourselves and soe purchased the lease remaining from Evans with our money and placed men players, which were Hemings, Condall, Shakspere and Richard Burbage.'

Accordingly there can be no doubt that Shakspeare was an actor, perhaps as early as when he was engaged in writing poetry. In the latter capacity, he must pretty quickly have acquired celebrity and attracted attention, as is evident from a number of unquestionable testimonies.* In the first place and above all others from the frequently-quoted passage in R. Greene's pamphlet, 'A Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance.' Greene here warns his associates, Marlowe, Lodge, &c., to withdraw from the profession which had proved his ruin, and not to trust too much to the applause of the public, 'for there is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers, that with his tiger's heart, wrapt in a player's hyde, supposes that he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the country.' By the simile of 'tiger's heart,' which is a parody on a line in the third part of Henry VI. (i., 4), and by the expression 'Skake-scene,' Shakspeare's name is as good as mentioned. Greene's pamphlet appeared

* The passage in Spenser's *Tears of the Muses* (of 1590 or 1591), which Collier and others have hitherto referred to Shakspeare, can no longer be appealed to since Tott (in his edition of Spenser's works) has proved that the poem was most probably composed as early as 1580. Moreover, it is only in a most constrained manner that the words can be made to apply to Shakspeare. On the other hand, it is very probable that Spenser in his *Colin Clout's come home again*, a poem written in 1594, had Shakspeare in his mind when he says:—

And there, though last not least, is Ætion:
A gentler shepheard may nowhere be found,
Whose Muse, full of high thoughts' invention,
Doth, like himselfe, heroically sound.

For Shakspeare's name is the only one of contemporary poets which had an 'heroic' sound.

in print in 1592, and was probably the last he wrote, for the unhappy poet died on the third of September of the same year; it must therefore have been written in the first half of the year 1592. Accordingly, Shakspeare at this time must have been one of the most popular, nay perhaps the most popular (the *only* Shake-scene) of all the dramatic poets in London; for Greene addresses his warnings to poets, not to actors. Shakspeare must, moreover, have already proved himself great in *all* of the different species of drama popular in those days, and therefore the stage must not only have possessed comedies of his composition, but also successful tragedies and so-called histories, otherwise Greene could not have called him an absolute 'Johannes Factotum.' But no doubt the young, untutored poet did not at once succeed in attaining this height of popularity; and we may, therefore, with safety assume that, about the middle of the year 1592, at least five or six of his earlier dramas had already been performed.

Greene's evidence is corroborated by Henry Chettle; the latter, originally a printer, had encouraged the publication of Greene's pamphlet, and as it had given great offence to one or two of the play-makers at whom it was aimed—no doubt Shakspeare and Marlowe—the author was attacked by them and defended himself in a paper which he prefixed to one of his pamphlets entitled 'Kind Harte's Dreame, &c.' He here treats his one opponent, Marlowe, in rather an indifferent, nay contemptuous manner, but as regards Shakspeare, he says, 'the other, whom at that time I did not so much spare as since I wish I had—(by omitting and correcting some of Greene's words)—because myself have seen his demeanour no less civil than he was excellent in the quality he professes: besides, divers men of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art.' The pamphlet must have been written towards the end of 1592, as it begins with the words: "About three months ago, Mr. R. Greene died," &c. It therefore confirms what Greene reluctantly had to acknowledge, that Shakspeare, in 1592, was distinguished in his profession; but it also testifies

to the general esteem in which he stood on account of his honest and honourable character, and as the pamphlet expressly praises the 'facetious grace' of his composition, it intimates that it must more especially have been Shakspeare's comedies, which made him the favourite of the public.

CHAPTER III.

SHAKSPEARE AS AN ACTOR. SOME REMARKS ON HIS SONNETS.

WHEN Chettle calls Shakspeare 'excellent in the qualitie he professes,' these words, to judge from the context, refer in the first place and pre-eminently to Shakspeare the 'play-maker.' And yet they do not exclude Shakspeare the player, as the art of an actor was no doubt also his 'profession.' The Lord Chamberlain's company, to which he belonged, played during summer in the Globe theatre, and during winter in the small, so-called private theatre of Blackfriars, which has already been mentioned on pp. 106-110. This company was evidently considered the principal and most famous one in London, as may even be inferred from King James, soon after his accession, taking them into his service, and the company accordingly receiving the title of 'The King's servants.' (Perhaps the next famous company was that of the Lord Admiral, which was afterwards in the service of the Prince of Wales, and then that of the Earl of Worcester, the members of which were appointed court players to Queen Anne.) The most distinguished artist of the company was unquestionably Shakspeare's friend Richard Burbage, who, according to an extant elegy on his death, played the grandest and most famous characters in Shakspeare's dramas—Romeo, Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Prince Henry, Henry V., Richard III., Brutus, Coriolanus, Shylock, Pericles—and was eulogised by contemporary poets as 'England's great Roscius.' That Shakspeare could not compete with him as an actor, I infer from the simple fact that he entrusted Burbage with the most important and most difficult parts in his own dramas; what parts he reserved for himself, our theatrical reports do not say. In the announcements of the pieces to be performed, the actors are indeed mentioned, but the parts they undertook are not specified, thus we only accidentally know (and this

not even with certainty), that Shakspeare had played the part of the Ghost in 'Hamlet,' and that of Adam in 'As you like it;' he is said to have especially distinguished himself as the Ghost in 'Hamlet.' It must, however, not be concluded, from Shakspeare's having played these two subordinate parts, that he was in general but an indifferent actor. A poetaster of the day (J. Davies, who flourished about 1603) is rather inclined to praise his talent as an actor, and mentions him several times along with Burbage, and observes with emphasis that if he had not played the parts of some kings (i. e., had he not been an actor) he would have been a worthy associate for a king. Aubrey also reports from tradition that he played uncommonly well. According to Rowe and Wright,* on the other hand, the traditional opinion was generally more to the effect that he was a better poet than actor.† And if we bear in mind how little Sophocles accomplished as an actor, and how badly Schiller recited his own poems, the tradition seems to gain in probability, i. e., that Shakspeare probably was not an actor of the first rank, even though he may have distinguished himself in subordinate parts.

Apart from the psychological interest excited by the question of Shakspeare's talent as an actor, it is in so far of some importance here, as it turns upon the question as to whether Shakspeare owed his increasing fame and prosperity more to his profession as an actor or to his activity as a poet. No doubt to the latter; for wherever his name is mentioned, it is almost exclusively Shakspeare, the poet, who is extolled. The appearance of his two poetical narratives, 'Venus and Adonis,' in 1593, and 'The Rape of Lucrece,' in 1594, were the means of spreading his reputation even in those circles where theatrical pieces were not regarded as works worthy the name of a poet.‡ Both poems, which met with extraordinary success (of 'Venus and Adonis' five editions appeared before 1602),

* *Historia Histrionica*, 1699

† The letter of Lord Southampton, said to have been discovered by Collier, and in which Shakspeare is called 'an actor of good account in the company,' is likewise a forgery. Ingleby, *l.c.*, p. 256 f.

‡ In what sense Shakspeare, in the dedication, calls *Venus and Adonis* the 'first heir of his invention' cannot be ascertained with any certainty. At all events, he cannot have meant it to signify his first poetic production, for it is completely beyond a doubt that, before

were dedicated to Lord Southampton, who, it is true, is far better known from his relation to Shakspeare than from any other reason. It has therefore been concluded that Shakspeare, as early as 1593 and 1594, gained an influential friend in this nobleman, who, in James' reign, was appointed to high state offices. Whether and how far he was his 'friend,' is however again by no means certain. In the dedication to '*Venus and Adonis*,' and more eloquently in that to '*The Rape of Lucrece*,' Shakspeare indeed speaks of his 'love without end,' and his esteem for Southampton, but in reference to the latter he merely says: 'The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance.' Rowe, indeed, informs us that Southampton, at one time, gave him a thousand pounds to enable him 'to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to,' and observes that he would not have mentioned the extraordinary munificence of this patron, had he not been assured that the story originated with Sir W. Davenant, who was probably acquainted with Shakspeare's affairs. However, even though the story deserves full credit—and we have no definite reason for doubting it—still it nevertheless does not follow that an intimate friendship existed between Lord Southampton and the poet. Hemminge and Condell, the editors of the first folio and quarto editions of Shakspeare's works, praise the Earl of Pembroke and his brother the Earl of Montgomery for having always received not only Shakspeare's poems, but the 'living poet' himself with great favour; and that this was their special reason for venturing to dedicate to them the collection of his works.

And yet it is still pretty generally supposed that the young nobleman, the 'sweet boy,' to whom the majority

1593, he had already composed a number of dramas for the stage. It is possible that *Venus and Adonis* was written before he left Stratford, and that it was merely remodelled for the press; but it is not probable that Shakspeare would have expressly mentioned the circumstance in the dedication. The expression may be explained from the above-mentioned prejudice against theatrical pieces, which were not considered works of poetical invention, and which it was likewise not customary to have printed, at least not by the poets themselves, inasmuch as they were the property of the theatres in which they were played.

of Shakspeare's 154 Sonnets are addressed, and whom the poet treats in the most confidential manner as his true, intimate, and 'best beloved friend,' was Lord Southampton.* The supposition, however, is very weakly supported, for, in the first place, the old dispute is by no means decided as to whether the Sonnets are to be referred to Shakspeare's own life and personal relations, or whether they have not rather to be regarded as free ebullitions of lyric emotion upon poetically invented situations and characters. But even if anyone feels convinced (and I am one of these)† that most of the Sonnets, and probably all, are poems written upon certain occasions—in the higher sense—and refer to definite persons of the poet's acquaintance, and to definite circumstances and events from his life—of course always in a poetical form and conception, so to speak, poetically idealised—still

* The Sonnets, it is true, did appear together with a larger poem, *A Lover's Complaint*, and were not printed till 1609, but no doubt partly extend back to about the middle of the ninth decade, for two of them are already met with in Jaggard's edition of *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599 (a collection of lyric poems, among which are some of Shakspeare's); Meres also, in his *Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury*, of the year 1598, mentions some of Shakspeare's 'sugred' sonnets to his private friends.

† On this point I differ from the opinion of my worthy friend Delius: *Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakspeare-Gesellschaft*, 1865, p. 18 ff. He with his usual acuteness and comprehensive learning, defends the opinion of Dyce and other English critics, that the Sonnets are mere free, poetical effusions, and the persons and situations purely fictitious. However, he could only show, and has only shown that they *can* be regarded as such; it does not follow that they *must* be considered such effusions, it also does not follow that they are not founded upon personal relations. It likewise does not at all follow that the attempts made to point out to which persons and to what personal relations they refer have hitherto entirely failed, or have at least been very unsatisfactory; for we know so extremely little of the circumstances of Shakspeare's life, that this cannot be surprising. In spite of this failure, I believe that every unprejudiced person, reading the Sonnets, must be impressed with the fact that the poet's own heart is there speaking from personal experience, and that, on the whole, they are written in that peculiar state of mind which gradually comes over a poet when, as it were, he allows different kinds of emotions, events, situations, &c., to pass by his soul in the mirror of remembrance and reflection; in this process they naturally take the form of poetical effusions, which as naturally address themselves to those persons by whom they have been called forth. Further remarks in regard to the Sonnets will be found in Book ii. chap. vi.

these references apply too little to Lord Southampton's life and person. Thus, in my opinion J. Boaden is perfectly justified in maintaining the hypothesis to be impossible.* As little appropriate to Southampton is the dedication which the publisher T. T. (Thomas Thorpe) has prefixed to his edition of the sonnets, which is couched in the following words: 'To the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets, Mr. W. H., all happiness, and that eternity promised by our ever-living poet, wisheth the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth.'† As Southampton's family name was Henry Wrothesley, the W. H. may have applied to him. But these two letters coincide perfectly with the name of another noble patron of Shakspeare's, the already-mentioned Earl of Pembroke, William Herbert; and J. Boaden has proved, moreover, that the life, age and character of the subsequent Earl of Pembroke are in accordance with the hints and indications suggested by the Sonnets. However, A. Dyce justly replies that it is in the highest degree improbable, that a publisher of that time would have ventured publicly to address the Earl of Pembroke as Mr. W. H. This objection, of course, applies with equal force to the opinion which supposes the W. H. to refer to Southampton. We must, therefore, again admit that we do not know, nor can we even guess, to whom the mysterious dedication was addressed. On the other hand, however, according to the natural sense of the words, it proves this much, that the Sonnets are not only addressed to one definite person, but that they arose from the poet's personal circumstances and relations to this person—the only begetter—and with this we may at any rate rest satisfied.

In a review of the first volume of this work,‡ I have been reproached for having omitted to take into consideration G. Massey's 'ingenious and suggestive work,' and

* Let the reader examine what Boaden, *On the Sonnets of Shakspeare*, &c., (London, T. Rodd. 1837, p. 21 ff.) says on this point, and every unprejudiced reader will, I hope, agree with me. See also Book. ii. chap. vi.

† The extremely forced 'interpretation' of these words made by Phil. Clásles. Dyce justly calls a groundless fancy. I may therefore spare myself the trouble of drawing the reader's attention to it.

‡ *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1868, No. 146.

S. Neil's 'very plausible hypothesis' concerning the Sonnets; I must therefore add a few remarks upon both, although in my opinion they are scarcely worth mentioning. For the 'very plausible hypothesis' of S. Neil, according to whom the Mr. W. H. is supposed to have been Shakspeare's brother-in-law, I consider to be such a capricious idea, that I look upon it as one of the many 'groundless fancies' which, like a darkening cloud, have settled upon Shakspeare's life and poems; Neil brought forward his hypothesis at first rather timidly in his 'Shakspeare, a Critical Biography' (London, 1863, p. 104 ff.), but afterwards tried to defend it, in a couple of articles contributed to the 'British Controversialist' (1864) and to 'Notes and Queries' (1865). The dedication of the publisher Th. Thorpe (the editor of the first edition of the Sonnets of 1609), which has become so famous, and upon the sense and interpretation of which the whole question of the Sonnets depends, is word for word written thus:—"To the onlie begetter of These ensuing Sonnets Mr. W. H. all Happinesse, And that eternitie Promised By Our ever-living Poet Wisheth the Well-wishing Adventurer in Setting forth T. T." Neil begins by showing that no Shakspearian scholar—who has understood the word *begetter* to signify the receiver of the Sonnets, that is, the person addressed, who had inspired the poet to write them, and in so far was the 'begetter'—has yet been able to explain who this 'begetter,' designated by the initials W. H., can have been. He therefore, agreeing with Chalmers and Boswell, takes the word *begetter* in the sense of a person 'who gets or preserves anything,' and thus understands it to refer to that person, who procured for the publisher the manuscript of the Sonnets by having, with the poet's knowledge and sanction, collected them from the different persons to whom Shakspeare had dedicated them; hence that the word referred to the 'collector' of the copies upon which the printed edition was based. This collector, Neil thinks, probably was Will. Hathaway, one of the brothers of Shakspeare's wife,—of whom we know nothing except that he was born on the 30th of November, 1578, and lived in 1647 in Weston-upon-Avon, in the county of Gloucester 'as a yeoman.'

However Neil ought surely to have first proved that 'to beget,' can be employed in the sense of to collect, and begetter in the sense of collector. This is by no means proved by the fact that beget (according to Skinner) is derived from the Anglo-Saxon begettan—*obtinere*; for *obtinere* and *colligere* are two very different ideas (*obtinere* cannot even be employed in the general sense of to procure, but has simply the kindred meanings of to hold, retain, maintain, to effect something). But, moreover, the question here is not about the Anglo-Saxon word begettan, but about the English word beget, and this word, according to S. Johnson's Dictionary, invariably signifies to generate, procreate, produce (hence begetter, 'he that procreates'), and it is in this sense that Shakspeare employs it.* But even granted that *begetter* could signify as much as procurer, collector, or that the publisher Thorpe understood the word in this sense, how is it to be explained, how is it conceivable, that 'our ever-living poet,' (Shakspeare) should promise this mere collector of the Sonnets *eternitie*? What was his reason for so doing, what specially induced him to promise eternity to the utterly unknown and insignificant yeoman Will Hathaway—who must not be confounded with his brother Richard Hathaway, who had at least appeared as a dramatic poet, even though of a very inferior rank?

In this difficult question, which threatens to annihilate the whole Collector-hypothesis, N. Delius comes to Mr. Neil's rescue. He also (in his edition of Shakspeare's works vol. VII., Introduc.; *Jahrbuch III.*, 19 ff.) takes *begetter*

* Phil. Chasles (*Athenæum*, 1867, May, p. 662) adduces thirty-one passages from Shakspeare, in which the word *beget* is invariably employed in this sense; they may possibly be all the passages in which the word occurs. G. Massey (p. 421) indeed cites three passages—one from *King Alfred's Proverbs*, one from Chaucer, and another from Dekker's *Satiromastix*, in which *beget* has the meaning of to *obtain*; but the three passages nevertheless do not support Neil's hypothesis, which Massey has adopted. For *beget* with them is indeed meant to signify as much as *obtain*, but not in the sense of procuring something for *another*, or of receiving something for *another*, but in the sense of receiving, acquiring for *oneself*. It is only the passage in Dekker that in some degree approaches the sense of to procure, but still only means to say 'they will receive the *reversion* for you'; at all events, it is the *only* one which could be adduced in favour of Neil's and Massey's interpretation of *begetter*.

in the sense of the procurer of the manuscript,—without, however, by even one word, establishing his right to do so—and, in order to evade the fatal question, interpretes the dedication as if Thorpe had meant to say that he wished him (the begetter) all happiness and that eternity ‘which the poet in his Sonnets promised to the subject of them.’ How T. Thorpe should have come to wish the collector of the Sonnets, as such, eternity—an evidently very odd wish—we are not told. But apart from this, Kreyssig has already very justly replied that those words which Delius has inserted after ‘eternitie’—‘which the poet in his poems promised to the subject of them’—are an arbitrary interpolation, for in the text it is simply said: ‘that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet.’ Delius meets the objection by the counter-remark, that even the interpretation of *begetter* as producer, that is, the person who gave rise to the Sonnets, cannot be maintained without an arbitrary interpolation, that moreover T. Thorpe—if the word *promised* is to be referred to *begetter*—would have had to say, not *promise*, but *promised him*, and, that it would surely have been very strange, if Thorpe had again wished that person eternity to whom it had long since been expressly promised by the poet himself. I, on my part, see nothing strange in the fact of anyone wishing, that another may really receive what has been promised to him. But in my opinion it would certainly be more strange if Thorpe had wished the *begetter* of the manuscript that eternity which Shakspeare in his Sonnets had promised to another. I also do not see, what the ‘arbitrary interpolation’ is supposed to be, without which the interpolation of *begetter* as producer, occasioner, cannot be maintained. For that *begetter*, according to the usage of the language, can be understood in this sense, is in my opinion a matter of certainty. And, in like manner, I consider it as perfectly admissible, according to the usage of the English language, to drop the *him* after the word *promised*, when the participle follows as closely after the subject—to which it refers—as in this dedication; at all events, we cannot expect to find correct modern English from the publisher Thorpe.

Delius, however, also remarks, that the friend, who

is supposed to have inspired Shakspeare to write the Sonnets—as he is called their *onlie begetter*—‘must have been a very Proteus,’ if all that is said of him in the Sonnets, was meant to apply to him. However, this objection may also be brought against his own interpretation; for what is the *onlie* to signify, if *begetter* is taken in the sense of a *collector*? What is supposed to have induced T. Thorpe to have so expressly called his Mr. W. H. the *onlie* collector of the manuscripts? Moreover Delius contradicts himself, when, as we have seen, he nevertheless understands the words *promised eternitie* to refer—not to the *begetter*, but to the ‘subject’ of the Sonnets. For by this very assertion he implicitly admits that this ‘subject’ was but *one* person. Finally if the last twenty-six Sonnets be excepted, I think that everything that Shakspeare says of the friend—to whom the Sonnets are addressed—applies very well to one and the same person; Delius, at least, has not proved the contrary. And even the last twenty-six Sonnets, which treat of the much discussed love affair, may, even though not originally addressed to the same friend, have very possibly been handed to him, (by Shakspeare or by the dark lady) and been regarded as occasioned by him, for the friend was evidently mixed up in the love affair. Accordingly, it is still very doubtful whether, in fact, there can be any question of a *begetter* or collector of the Sonnets in Thorpe’s Dedication; and therefore, in my opinion, it is beyond a doubt that this dubitable collector was *not* the yeoman Will Hathaway.

Gerald Massey’s work bears the pretentious title of ‘Shakspeare’s Sonnets never before Interpreted, his Private Friends identified, together with a Recovered Likeness of Himself’ (London 1866), and contains no less than 603 pages. The author, in tedious diffuseness, weaves and spins out the contents of the ‘never before interpreted,’ Sonnets, a romance, in which the Earl of Southampton, Miss Vernon as his betrothed, his bride, and his wife, Lady Rich, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, are the chief figures; this romance he tries to place in hypothetical connection with the meagre historical reports of the life and characters of the above-named gentlemen and ladies.

Shakspeare here plays the part either of the devoted, sometimes admonishing friend and confidant, or of the ready family-poet, who, upon occasion, writes a Sonnet in the name of the one or the other of his patrons. Massey, accordingly, distinguishes what he calls 'personal,' and 'dramatic Sonnets;' the personal Sonnets Shakspeare is supposed to have written in his own name and invariably addressed to the Earl of Southampton in order to prove his love, gratitude, esteem, &c., for the latter; the 'dramatic' Sonnets, on the other hand, he is supposed to have composed for or addressed to Southampton, Elizabeth Vernon, and the Earl of Pembroke. Massey narrates his romance somewhat in the following manner: Shakspeare made the acquaintance of young Southampton, which soon grew into personal friendship, as early as about the year 1591. As the generous and amiable young lord was rather inclined to squander 'the treasure' of his 'lusty days,' Shakspeare addressed a number of personal Sonnets to him, in which he advises him to marry, also praises his beauty, promises him immortality, and throws side glances upon a 'rival poet'—presumably Marlowe—the first twenty-five Sonnets and a number of others). When, however, Southampton became acquainted with the lovely Miss Vernon and fell in love with her, the subject as well as the manner of treating the Sonnets became changed: Shakspeare began to write 'dramatically' about his friend's passion; but it was especially at a later period—when Elizabeth Vernon became jealous of Lady Rich, her friend and cousin, who, therefore, must probably have received some attentions from Southampton—that Shakspeare wrote the Sonnets 144, 33-35, 41, 42, in which the jealous lady sometimes pours forth her heart in a soliloquy, sometimes in lamentations to her beloved; and Sonnets 133, 134, and 40, which she (that is, Shakspeare in her name) addressed to Lady Rich.

How a lady in Miss Vernon's position could have come to make a confidant of a man like Shakspeare about her jealousy—which every woman usually endeavours carefully to conceal—and whether Shakspeare wrote the Sonnets purely in response to the feelings of her own heart or at her wish and request, and also whether the three Sonnets

were actually handed over to Lady Rich, we are, of course, not told, although a satisfactory answer to these, in my opinion, insolvable enigmatical questions, would first give the whole hypothesis a somewhat reliable basis, provided, that the subject of the Sonnets in question, corresponded with the hypothesis (which, however, as I think, is not the case).

These lamentations, Southampton (that is, Shakspeare, speaking out of the latter's heart or at his request) answers by two Sonnets, 56 and 75, in which he tries to pacify his beloved and to renew the affectionate relation which had become somewhat cool. She, however, repays him in his own coin, by beginning a flirtation with some other cavalier (unfortunately even Massey's ingenuity has been unable to guess who this favoured one was!) in regard to which Shakspeare-Southampton, or Southampton-Shakspeare, pours forth his lamentations in six Sonnets (49, 88, 91-93, 95). Then come some 'personal' Sonnets in which Shakspeare expresses his great sorrow about the 'somewhat loose life,' of the headstrong youth. Thereupon follow three Sonnets (87, 89, 90), in which the lord bids farewell to his beloved, because he thinks she has rejected him on account of his unworthiness. However, during his absence on a journey, the quarrel, in some way, comes to an end, and the next three Sonnets (97-99), which Shakspeare-Southampton addresses to his beloved, are again overflowing with love and admiration. In the following Sonnets (100-103, 76, 108, 105), Shakspeare excuses himself for his long silence (occasioned by Lord S.'s absence), and at the same time sings in praise of Southampton's constancy through which he has at last won the affections of his lady-love. These Sonnets are connected with a number of others (109-112, 121, 117-120, 116) in which Southampton-Shakspeare expresses his joy at his reconciliation with his beloved lady, and Shakspeare sings in honour of the marriage of the two. Between these and the Sonnets which Lord S. addresses to his wife and to Shakspeare from the Tower, during and after his imprisonment (123-125, 115, 107), are inserted six 'personal Sonnets,' in which Shakspeare principally speaks of his death. This concludes the 'Southampton

Sonnets.' The others, that is, all those which, in Massey's opinion are addressed to, speak or sing of the 'dark lady' (which Massey has placed together on p. 367 ff.), Shakspeare is supposed to have written for William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who, in 1598 had come to London and become a 'personal' friend of Shakspeare; we are again not told whether he wrote from his own heart or at his friend's request; these Sonnets describe the young Earl's love for the same Lady Penelope Rich, who had excited the jealousy of Miss Vernon; nay, it is even supposed that some of these Sonnets—on account of their supposed lameness—were written by the young Earl himself!

This last discovery, at the same time, furnishes the ingenious discoverer with the best means of solving the mysterious dedication by Thorpe. For Southampton is supposed to have given the Sonnets addressed to and composed for himself, to the Earl of Pembroke, who was also a friend of his, and the latter to have handed them and those referring to the 'dark' lady, over to Th. Thorpe, in order to have them printed (p. 428). The grateful publisher, accordingly, eulogises him in the Dedication under the initials of W. H. as the *onlie begetter*, that is, the collector of the Sonnets! The inconvenient questions, as to how it happened that Southampton should have handed over his Sonnets to Pembroke, and more especially what could have induced the latter, of course with the knowledge and consent of Shakspeare, of Southampton and his wife, to publish these Sonnets as early as 1609, in spite of their containing such distinct accounts of the private history of the love and the perplexities of the hearts of both men—that even 250 years afterwards, G. Massey has been able to understand and explain them, and must, therefore, have been a much easier task to the contemporaries of both, and have furnished acceptable material to the *chronique scandaleuse*!—Massey does not find it necessary to answer. He thinks that the subjects of the Sonnets as well as the Dedication are a distinct guarantee for the missing facts, and therefore that Pembroke must obviously have received the Sonnets from Southampton, otherwise he could not have procured them for Mr. Thorpe, and the latter could not have expressed his gratitude! *Sapienti sat*. Whoever care-

fully compares the actual contents of the Sonnets with this romance—into which Massey has worked them—will I trust agree with my wish that *this* attempt, to ‘dramatise’ Shakspeare’s Sonnets, may for all ages serve as a warning against similar undertakings!

It may, however, be asked, what can have induced Shakspeare, or those persons to whom the Sonnets were addressed, to have published these poems with their personal relations, which do not always let either himself or his young friend appear in a very favourable light? I do not know whether any one has yet made the assertion and tried to establish it, that Shakspeare *himself* caused them to be published; but I see no reason for such a supposition, even though *begetter* can only signify as much as *producer* (the person addressed, receiver). The print itself, with its many errors, and the obvious carelessness with which the Sonnets appear to have been arranged, or rather thrown together promiscuously, at all events does not support the supposition, and Thorpe’s Dedication decidedly contradicts it: for if Shakspeare himself had published the Sonnets, he would also have himself dedicated them to his young friend. Accordingly it would be the latter only who could have caused them to be printed. But even for this hypothesis we cannot discover any satisfactory motive, and moreover we should have to presuppose that Shakspeare gave his consent to this, which I, on my part, do not believe.

If, however, under any circumstance some hypothesis must be brought forward, and if, accordingly, we too may be permitted to make use of the right which Massey has so recklessly made use of, and give free reins to our inventive imagination, then I consider that relatively the most probable hypothesis is, that some secret opponent of Shakspeare’s or of his young friend, succeeded in procuring copies of the Sonnets, and had them printed *against* the knowledge and consent of both (as had no doubt already happened as regards those Sonnets published in 1599 by Jaggard). About the year 1609, Southampton and Pembroke were already distinguished men, and it was even worth the trouble to invent an intrigue about them, or to expose them to the *chronique scandaleuse* of London. Even Shak-

speare occupied a position high enough to excite envy, especially on account of his friendship with the most eminent men of the country. It needs no proof to show that the times, the character of King James, the relations and conditions of his court, &c., could easily give rise to such an intrigue. Thorpe may therefore have received the manuscript in this manner; nay, he was, perhaps, expressly advised to point out—by his Dedication, more especially by the initials W. H.—that person to whom the Sonnets were addressed, and whom the intrigue was chiefly meant to affect (this in my opinion seems still most probably to have been William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke). Shakspeare may have been most unpleasantly affected by the publication, but could not well disown it without drawing still more attention to the Sonnets and making the matter worse than it was; his distinguished friend was no doubt pretty much in the same case. Both, therefore, took no notice of the publication, and seem thereby to have effected their purpose, at least we are not informed that the Sonnets excited any special attention.

I entirely deny that Shakspeare—in the Sonnets—can be supposed to play a part incompatible with his strictly moral aspirations and honourable character, especially when we consider that the love affair with the dark lady took place about 1595, when he was still a youth. At all events—as already said—from existing facts and indications, we cannot either prove or even maintain that Shakspeare was an abstract hero of virtue, and that he was in *all* points immaculate.

By the above remarks I by no means wish to add another ‘hypothesis’ to the mass which lay claim to truth or approbation—I merely bring this forward to oppose the vagaries of Neil and Massey, and to show that it is possible to form all sorts of other vagaries about the unsolvable mystery.

CHAPTER IV.

SHAKSPEARE'S WORLDLY CIRCUMSTANCES.

WHATEVER else may have been the case, after the ninth decade, at all events, Shakspeare not only possessed patrons and friends among the public, but also among the higher circles of London society; and they not merely valued the poet's works but took a great interest in him personally. His worldly circumstances also seem to have improved in the same proportion as he rose in fame as a poet and man. The document of the year 1596—a petition from the proprietors and players of Blackfriars Theatre to the Queen's Privy Council—where Shakspeare's name stands fifth among the proprietors named, is, indeed, as much suspicious of being a forgery as the list of the number of shares and other property which Shakspeare is said to have possessed in the wardrobe and the 'properties' of Blackfriars Theatre.* But we know from extant records and letters, that in the Spring of 1597 he purchased, for 60*l.*, one of the best houses in his native town, known by the name of New Place; that in the following year he received various solicitations from his own townsmen for loans in money, and, as it seems, complied with the requests; that in May 1602 he added a large piece of arable land to his possessions in Stratford, for which he paid 320*l.*; that in September of the same year, a copyhold property (cottagium) together with appurtenances was made over to him; that he soon afterwards, in addition, purchased for 60*l.* a messuage or farm-house, with two barns, two gardens, and two orchards; that in 1605, for 440*l.* he took on lease the half of the great and small tithes of Stratford, and that as early as

* The first document Collier claims to have discovered in the State Paper Office; the second among the papers of Bridgewater House. Ingleby, p. 289 ff. 246 f.

1613 he bought a house in London in the neighbourhood of Blackfriars for 140*l*. As money in those days was five times more valuable than it now is, the sums thus expended prove that Shakspeare had gradually become a wealthy man.

Accordingly, as early as the end of the sixteenth century he, no doubt, was one of the first and most influential members of the Lord Chamberlain's company. It was upon his recommendation that the first piece with which Ben Jonson appeared as a theatrical poet ('Every man in His Humour') was accepted, although the governing body at first wished to have it rejected. In the already mentioned patent (of the 17th of May, 1603) in which James I. took the company into his service, and sanctioned their giving all kinds of dramatic performances, not only in the Globe Theatre in London, but in any other towns, universities, &c., Shakspeare's name stands second on the list beside that of Laurence Fletcher, who, as it seems, was named first merely on account of his special and personal relations to the king. That Elizabeth and James honoured Shakspeare's poetical works with their special approbation is expressly attested by Ben Jonson in his well known eulogy, written in memory of his beloved friend, for the folio edition of Shakspeare's works. Tradition reports that the Maiden Queen found such special pleasure in the character of Falstaff, that she expressed a wish to see him exhibited in love in another play, and moreover one to be performed within fourteen days—this is said to have induced Shakspeare to write the 'Merry Wives of Windsor.' Such is the report given with actual certainty by Dennis and Rowe (probably from the mouth of Dryden and Davenant), and we have no reason to doubt the truth of the statement; on the contrary internal reasons—in the form and subject of the piece—seem to corroborate it. King James (perhaps on the occasion of a performance of 'Macbeth') is even said to have condescended to write an amicable letter to Shakspeare in his own hand. This has been doubted for reasons of etiquette, but as King James' condescension—as Dyce wishes us to remember—occasionally even took the form of un-kingly familiarity, and that the most trustworthy persons (such as the Duke of

Buckingham) had seen the letter in Sir W. Davenant's hands, into whose possession it had fallen, there is no reason why we should deny the weak potentate the honour of writing the letter, seeing that there is so little else to honour in him.* In any case the long list of Shakspeare's plays which, according to the partially extant 'Accounts of the Revels,' were performed at the King's command after Nov. 1604, prove that Shakspeare's dramas were as much liked at Court as on the popular stage.

Accordingly we may with safety assume that it was not only the opinion of a single critic, but the public voice, when Francis Meres† maintains that: 'as Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latines: so Shakspeare among ye English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy witness his 'Gentlemen of Verona,' 'The Comedy of Errors,' 'Love's Labour Lost,' 'Love's Labour Won' (probably 'All's Well that Ends Well'), 'Midsummer-night's Dream,' and 'The Merchant of Venice'; for tragedy his 'Richard II.' 'Richard III.' 'Henry IV.' 'King John,' 'Titus Andronicus,' and 'Romeo and Juliet;' and then adds, 'as Epius Stolo said, that the Muses would speake with Plautus tongue, if they would speake Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakspeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speake English.' Weever indulges in similar eulogies,‡ in a Sonnet addressed to Shakspeare, where after speaking of 'Venus and Adonis' and 'Lucrece,' he especially commends 'Romeo, and Richard, and their powerful attractive beauty.' Equally

* The letter of Sam. Daniel, the poet, to Lord Egerton, which Collier claims to have discovered in Bridgewater House, and which intimates that Shakspeare applied for the office of a 'Master of the King's Revels,' but did not receive—because he was an actor,—and also James' patent, by which Shakspeare, Daborn, and others were nominated instructors of the 'Children of the Revellers to the Queene,' are, however, most probably likewise forgeries. Ingleby, p. 247 f. 252 f.

† In his *Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury*, 1598. Meres, it seems, enumerates the comedies in the chronological order in which they appeared; the tragedies, however, he evidently divides into two classes, the historical and the non-historical plays, and for this reason he names *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet* the two non-historical plays last, although *Titus Andronicus* was assuredly much older than the historical dramas mentioned.

‡ Weever, who published a collection of epigrams in 1599.

enthusiastic is Ben Jonson in his commendations of Shakspeare (his friend but also his rival) when in the above-mentioned eulogy he says: 'I confess thy writings to be such as neither man nor Muse can praise too much. 'Tis true, and all men's suffrage;' and again when he calls him the 'soul of the age! the applause! the delight and wonder of our stage,' and expressly places him, not only above Chaucer and Spenser, Lilly and Kyd, but also above Marlowe and Beaumont, nay, even above the ancient writers whom he esteemed so highly. We have no reason to doubt that this estimate of Shakspeare, as Ben Jonson asserts, was the general opinion; for even a man like J. Webster, a follower of the new antagonistic tendency of dramatic art, and no personal friend of Shakspeare's, mentions him nevertheless among the most distinguished theatrical poets of the day, for, in the preface to his tragedy 'Vittoria Corombona,' which was printed in 1612, he remarks: 'For mine own part, I have ever truly cherished my good opinion of other men's worthy labours, especially of that full and heightened style of Master Chapman; the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson; the no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher; and lastly (without wrong last to be named), the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakspeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their light, &c.'*

* Some recent opponents of Shakspeare have understood the word 'industry' to signify that Webster thereby meant to call Shakspeare a manufacturer of stage plays. But this only proves that they understand but little English. The word 'industry' in the sixteenth and seventeenth century was never used in the sense of blame, but only of praise or diligence and assiduity, and Webster, therefore, unquestionably, merely intended to commend, not the number but also the industrious, careful, composition of Shakspeare's dramas, and the success they met with. That he should name Chapman first, and Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher before Shakspeare is just as characteristic of his judgment and taste, as of his tendency and position: for it was only at a later date that he belonged to the more modern school, the most eminent representatives of which were the four above-mentioned poets.—(Compare Book iii.)

CHAPTER V.

SHAKSPEARE'S POETICAL CAREER.

THE decennium between 1597 and 1606 may perhaps have been the brightest period of Shakspeare's lifetime. Up to 1597-98 he had already written the twelve dramas enumerated by Meres, and no doubt also a number of youthful productions which Meres has passed over unnoticed. These were succeeded, probably at least, up to the year 1606 by 'Hamlet,' 'Othello,' 'King Lear,' 'Henry V.,' 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' 'Much Ado about Nothing,' 'Twelfth Night,' 'As You Like It,' 'Measure for Measure,' and perhaps, also, by even one or other of his remaining pieces. Hence, in spite of the generally very unsafe determinations as regards the dates of the first appearance of his dramas, still I think we may with some degree of certainty distinguish four different periods in Shakspeare's poetical career, and an equal number of stages in the development of his style, his mind, and his character. I consider that such plays as 'Titus Andronicus,' 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' 'The Comedy of Errors,' 'Love's Labour Lost,' 'The Taming of the Shrew,' the three parts of 'Henry VI.,' 'Pericles,'* and any other of the doubtful plays that may belong to him, still exhibit a certain youthful awkwardness, harshness, and immoderation; at one time an inclination to Marlowe's bombast, at another to Greene's diffuseness and superficiality, a certain ruggedness and abruptness, not only of language, but in the whole way in which the subject

* Dyce and Delius consider *Pericles* to be a work of some other author, which Shakspeare merely remodelled about 1608. I regard it as improbable that Shakspeare should, at so late a date, have applied himself to improving other men's works. Moreover, the inequality of the separate parts do not strike me as being so very marked, and accordingly my opinion is, that the play is a youthful production, which, however, Shakspeare partially remodelled in 1608.

is treated. His tragedies of that period still pretty closely resemble Marlowe's conception and treatment, in other words, the tragic element still has something violent, exaggerated, still verges too much upon the horrible, and still attaches itself to characters such as Aaron and Tamora in 'Titus Andronicus,' and Margaret and Richard in 'Henry VI.,' which, in delineation and colouring, in their inclination to fierceness and immoderation, betray some affinity to Marlowe's favourite figures. In his comedies we do, it is true, already meet with the overflowing fullness, ease, and elasticity of Shakspearian wit, but puns still predominate too much; the situations are still frequently somewhat unnatural; the characters still appear without any marked individuality, now and then still without solidity, wavering, and uncertain. The composition, it is true, already shows the great merits of the Shakspearian style: externally the subject is excellently arranged throughout, both as regards the succession of scenes and the development of the action; but the young poet has not yet succeeded in gathering the multifarious threads into one centre, and in fusing the different parts internally into one harmonious whole; the composition is still more like a mechanical arrangement than a united organisation. This first period, the time of his first attempts and sketches, which were possibly, at a later date, improved in various ways, may perhaps have extended from 1586-87 to 1592.

The intervening years, from 1592 to 1597-98, that is, between the first period and that of his highest renown and brilliancy, must have formed the transition, and may, accordingly, be termed the *second* period, or, so to say, the adolescence of Shakspeare's genius. If we assume that during this time 'Richard III.,' 'All's Well that Ends Well,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'The Taming of the Shrew,' 'King John,' 'Richard II.,' 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'Henry IV.,' and 'The Merchant of Venice,' were brought to light in the above succession (in regard to which, however, it is generally only internal reasons that can be taken into account), it seems astounding with what rapid, powerful, and safe steps Shakspeare proceeded through his career, and approached the goal which floated

before his imagination. What a difference between 'Titus Andronicus' and 'Romeo and Juliet,' between 'Henry VI.' and 'Richard II.,' between 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' 'The Comedy of Errors,' and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' or 'The Merchant of Venice.' Out of the youthful awkwardness, harshness, and want of moderation, his creative imagination rises to ever more regular, ever more correctly delineated forms, which in grace and beauty, as well as in fullness and grandeur, already eclipse everything that had, up to that day, been brought upon the stage. The composition, especially of 'Romeo and Juliet' and the following pieces, exhibits that systematic, proper, harmonious, and yet, at the same time, free arrangement of the material (very different from all stiffness and pedantry) which betrays a clear consciousness of the nature of dramatic art, as well as of a pure and delicate sense of beauty. His language is ever becoming easier, grander, and more fluent, his dialogue more natural, more appropriate, and more drastic. The comic element appears placed more and more in the characters and situations; and, although rich in witty words and play upon words, yet it no longer loses itself in a mere quibble upon words. On the other hand, the tragic element acquires that indescribably beautiful halo of elegiac, conciliatory, and exalting peace, such as plays round the figures of Romeo and Juliet and Richard II., without, however, losing anything in depth and power. In short, Shakspeare is beginning to be Shakspeare, or rather, he is already himself, even though not as yet in the perfect maturity, fullness, and greatness of manhood.

The full, and highest power and greatness of Shakspeare's genius is first apparent in his three great tragedies, 'Hamlet,*' 'King Lear,' and 'Othello,' which, in the over-

* I do not agree with Ch. Knight and K. Elze in supposing that *Hamlet* appeared before 1598. For in the first place it would surely be very strange that Meres should not have mentioned the play when, of the tragedies, he had not even forgotten to cite *Titus Andronicus*. But then it is very improbable that Shakspeare, as early as 1587, had not only written a *Hamlet* but that the piece should already have been so well known that Nash (in his epistle of Greene's *Menaphon*—printed in 1587) could have spoken of it as of an old drama. The *Hamlet* of 1587 was therefore assuredly an older piece, which Henslowe may

pathos, cannot, perhaps, be equalled; Shakspeare's humour is more particularly displayed in his comedies, 'Twelfth Night,' 'As You Like It,' and 'Much Ado about Nothing,' where the fantastic form of the comic is mingled with an almost equal amount of intrigue. The comic element in these plays exhibits that genial joyousness, that freedom of spirit, that ease and elasticity which treats life like a merry game, and for this reason rises above common reality, without separating itself too much from it. The tragic element—with the full power of tragic pathos—in the former cases, is combined with that force of ethical elevation and purification which distinguishes the tragic from what is merely sorrowful and painful, as well as from what is horrible, hideous, and revolting. Language and characterisation, invention and composition, are thoroughly Shakspearian, and exhibit all the peculiarities of his style in its fullest development, and in that as yet undimmed clearness and purity which appear but the poetical reflexes of his own inmost nature. Of a similar, though not quite the same excellence, are his 'Henry V.,' 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' 'Measure for Measure,' and whatever of the other dramas may belong to this period; and these raise his pure and glowing enthusiasm for the beautiful (by which they are pervaded) to the same excellence. We see the poet revel-

have 'warmed' up again in 1594 (in which year, according to the *Diary*, a Hamlet was performed, but not by Shakspeare's company). This then doubtless was the piece which Th. Lodge had in view when, in a pamphlet of the year 1596, he says of Th. Nash that: 'he looks as pale as ye wizard of the ghost which cried so miserably at ye theatre, like an oister-wife: Hamlet, revenge' To Shakspeare's *Hamlet* at least, this comparison cannot possibly have applied, for there is no such expression in the whole speech of the ghost as 'Hamlet, revenge;' moreover, the word revenge occurs only twice (in the edition of 1603 not more than once) in all that the ghost has to say, and is not uttered as a warning appeal, but at the beginning of his story; hence not 'cried' out, but spoken quietly in the flow of the speech. Lodge's allusion is accordingly wholly inappropriate to Shakspeare's *Hamlet*, in fact it is senseless. Very likely, however, Shakspeare may have had his attention drawn to the subject by Henslowe's performance, and have remodelled the piece in 1597, so that it may have been brought upon the stage soon after the publication of Meres' book.

ling in the exalted feeling of full, free success which was crowned with glory, in the blissful consciousness of the high, everlasting value of his creations, which he so beautifully expresses in the famous 81st Sonnet, where he tells his young friend :

' Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;
And tongues to be, your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead;
You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen)
Where breath most breathes,—even in the mouths of men.'

It cannot indeed be safely affirmed of Shakspeare's other dramas, that they were all composed after the year 1605-6, the fact being rather that we do not possess any record of their earlier origin. But the pieces which most critics place in this last (or fourth) period of Shakspeare's activity as a poet—'Troilus and Cressida,' 'Julius Cæsar,' 'Antony and Cleopatra,' 'Coriolanus,' 'Macbeth,' 'Cymbeline,' 'The Winter's Tale,' 'The Tempest,' 'Henry VIII.' and 'Timon of Athens'—are distinguished by certain characteristic features, which indicate that they may belong to this last period of the poet's life. In the first place, as regards rhythm and versification, they appear to be much more carelessly treated; the separate lines are not merely more frequently than usual interlaced with one another, where their contents would seem to require their separation, but we not unfrequently meet with lines of six feet, which occur but seldom in Shakspeare's earlier pieces.* Being clothed in this looser dress, the language becomes ever fuller, so overflowing with thoughts and imagery, that at times it seems as if it were broken, sometimes involved within itself, sometimes proceeding by fits and starts. The characters are drawn with more terseness and sharpness, are more manly, more abrupt, and of an iron firmness and solidity. The composition appears more compact, more concentrated, more rapid, and seems to proceed more directly in a straight line towards its goal, in contrast to the gracefully curved road along which the action moves

* As has been shown by W. S. Walker, *Shakspeare's Versification and its apparent Irregularities*, etc. London, 1854, p. 101 f.

in most of his earlier pieces, as may be seen from a careful comparison of 'Macbeth,' 'Coriolanus,' 'Julius Cæsar,' with 'Hamlet,' 'King Lear,' and 'Richard II.' The tragic element in 'King Lear'—in spite of its overwhelming power—is nevertheless still surrounded by the same mild elegiac halo of glory, which is exhibited in 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Richard II.,' and 'Hamlet,' but the conciliatory, exalting element in 'Macbeth' retires far into the background, and in 'Timon of Athens' is completely wanting. The comic element, on the other hand, receives a satirical colouring, as in 'Troilus and Cressida,' or is again withdrawn from real life into the region of fancy, as in the case of 'The Tempest,' and 'The Winter's Tale,' and becomes mingled with a strict ethical seriousness which no longer laughs at wickedness as mere weakness and perversity, but chastises, combats and brands it. The poet's own frame of mind and conception of life have evidently become more serious, stricter and less cheerful, and penetrated by the painful feeling of the vanity of all human greatness and beauty, in the bitter consciousness of a degenerating age afflicted with great infirmities and threatened by great misfortunes.

In the first place, the aspect of the theatre and the course of the development which dramatic art was taking, may have contributed their part towards producing and strengthening this state of Shakspeare's mind. Its course was obviously no progress, no ascending path leading up to perfection, but a path of decay, a falling off from the height that had already been attained. It was not only that Ben Jonson gained great success with his misconceived and misconstrued imitation of the ancients, and that he thus confounded the judgment of the public—far worse was the licentiousness, the coarseness and immorality which took more and more possession of the stage, and which deprived the drama of all its dignity and grandeur. In the pieces of the younger poets, which appeared about this time (since about 1605), not only do the nastiness of wit, coarse obscenity and equivocal expressions continue to gain the upperhand, but even the actions and characters represented continue, in an ever freer and bare-

faced manner, to make a public show of the whole filth of utterly immoral relations and situations. The drama was becoming more and more the mirror of that insolent licentiousness, frivolity, and immorality which, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was so habitual among the higher ranks of English society, and which contributed most to the spread of the Puritanical movement. The theatre, so recklessly denounced by the Puritans, followed the tendency of its aristocratic patrons and friends, and became ever more dependent upon a public which continued more and more to lose its sense of dignity and propriety, not merely in a moral, but also a political respect.* Deeply and more deeply therefore, Shakspeare must have felt the lowness and unworthiness of his position in life, and been disgusted with his profession; this feeling he affectingly describes in one of his Sonnets (No. 111.) in the words:—

“ O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
 The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
 That did not better for my life provide,
 Than public means, which public manners breeds.
 Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
 And almost thence my nature is subdued
 To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand :
 Pity me then, and wish I were renew’d ;
 Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
 Potions of eysell, ’gainst my strong infection :
 No bitterness that I will bitter think,
 Nor double penance, to correct correction.
 Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye,
 Even that your pity is enough cure me.”

But it was not alone in the theatre and dramatic art that symptoms of decay became manifest, these extended to the life of the people and throughout the kingdom, in short, the whole age was in a state of decline. King James—weak, frivolous, fond of pleasure, and whose

* According to a despatch of the French ambassador Beaumont, dated the 5th of April, 1608 (in Raumer, *Briefe aus Paris*, ii. 276), the court-players of James I. not only performed the lewd history of the Duke of Biron, but even brought upon the stage a ludicrous representation of the king himself ‘in an odd disguise,’ whereupon James forbade any more plays being given in London; this prohibition, however, does not appear to have continued long in force.

only interest in life was hunting and theological controversy—left the charge of his kingdom entirely in the hands of his councillors and favourites; it was a lame government upon which a few distinguished men, such as Cecil, Burleigh's son, Southampton and Pembroke, expended their talents in vain. Count Beaumont, the French ambassador, is not much more favourable in his opinion of the people; he writes, 'they are now (as compared with the days of Elizabeth) corrupted and fallen away, little stedfast in their religion, not devoted to their king either in love or obedience,' so much so, indeed that in 1603 he reports: 'I recognise so many seeds of unsoundness in England, so much is brewing in silence, and so many events appear to be inevitable, as to induce me to maintain that for an hundred years to come this kingdom will hardly misuse its prosperity to any other purpose than its own injury.*' Puritanism, which became more and more powerful, continued to gain ground, and ever more decisively threatened not only art and science, religion and Church, but the state itself, with that complete revolution which did actually break out a generation later. These signs of the times form the best commentary on those of Shakspeare's plays which we have ascribed to the last period of his life. They explain the gloomy, melancholy frame of mind which affected his patriotic soul, and which is re-echoed in his sixty-sixth sonnet—evidently referring to an actual state of things:

"Tir'd with all these, for restless death I cry,—
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone."

* Raumer, *History of the 16th and 17th centuries*, translated from the German, vol. ii. p. 199 f.

It is therefore perhaps possible—as Delius conjectures—that Shakspeare, being disgusted with the profession of an actor, which became more and more degenerate, and, in fact, being wearied with the licentiousness of London life—left the metropolis, as early as 1605–6, and withdrew to Stratford. But as Halliwell has pointed out, Shakspeare did not take up his abode in New Place (which he had had rebuilt and newly fitted up) till the year 1609; from that date therefore, it was probably no longer London, but Stratford which he considered his home. Yet there still remains the possibility that he may have removed to Stratford earlier, that is, before the alterations in New Place were made. At all events we have no record of his having appeared as an actor after 1603, in which year he took a part in Ben Jonson's 'Sejanus.' Still, if he returned to Stratford at so early a date, he must have remained in connection with the theatre down to the last years of his life, and must, from time to time, have gone to London, either to present a new play and help in the rehearsal, or to look after money matters and to transact other business. That he purchased the already mentioned tenement in London, in March 1613, is proved by the existing deed of purchase, and, that he was in London in November 1614—apparently come from Stratford—is evident from an extant memorandum, made by the town clerk of the day. Th. Greene, a distant relative of Shakspeare's—who was staying in London at the time, on account of some business matter—makes a note under the date of November 17th, 1614, of the fact that: 'my Cosen Shakspeare comyng yesterday to town, I went to see how he did,' etc. Rowe says that Shakspeare spent the latter portion of his life, 'as all men of good sense will wish theirs may be—in ease, retirement and the conversation of his friends. He had the good fortune to gather an estate equal to his occasion, and, in that, to his wish; and is said to have spent some years before his death at his native Stratford.'

Shakspeare's will—which has been preserved and in which he makes his elder daughter Susanna his principal heir, leaving his younger daughter Judith a considerable

legacy, also bequeathing some property to his sister Joan and her children, settling also small sums of money upon several of his friends as well as upon his 'fellows,' R. Burbage, J. Hemminge, and G. Condell, to buy themselves rings; leaving his wife, however, as already remarked, only 'his second best bed,' with the furniture—was prepared in Stratford, and is dated the 25th of March 1616, but a sketch of it seems to have been drawn up in January of the same year.

Four weeks later, on the 23rd of April, the greatest dramatist of his, and perhaps of all ages, breathed his last, without the world taking any notice of the event, and was buried on the 25th of the same month. His grave was originally covered by a simple stone slab, with the equally simple inscription, said to have been written by himself:

"Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To digg the dvst enclosed beare.
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones;
And cvrst be he yt moves my bones."

It was not till some years afterwards, but before 1623, that a monument was erected to him—probably by his son-in-law, Dr. Hall; it represents the poet in a simple position under an arch, a cushion before him, a pen in his right hand and a scroll in his left. Upon a tablet below the bust are the following Latin lines:

"Ivdicio Pylivm, genio Socratem, arte Maronem,
Terra tegit, popvlvs moeret, Olympvs habet."

And below these:

"Stay, passenger! why goest thou by so fast;
Read if thou canst, whom envious death hath plast
Within this monvment, Shakspeare, with whome
Quick natvre dide; whose name doth deck ys tombe
Far more than cost; sieth all yt he hath writt
Leaves living art bvt page to serve his witt."
Obiit Anno Doi. 1616, Aetatis 53, Die 23 Ap.

England's greatest poet was not honoured with a public

monument in Westminster Abbey till 124 years after his death.*

Two clergymen, a Mr. R. Davies (Archdeacon of Lichfield, d. 1708), and a Mr. Ward (appointed vicar of Stratford in 1662), collected notices of Stratford celebrities, as it seems, for their own amusement; one of them reports traditionally that Shakspeare 'died a Papist,' the other that Shakspeare, Drayton and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting and, as it appears, drank too deeply, for that Shakspeare died of a fever which he had thereby brought upon himself. Both of these statements, which are scarcely more than reports of the *chronique scandaleuse* of Stratford, are, in my opinion, refuted by an entry in the accounts of a Stratford chamberlain, which has only recently been brought to light. According to this entry, twenty pence were paid out of the town funds 'for one quart of sack and one quart of claret wine given to a preacher at Newe Place.' It is as good as certain that Shakspeare had removed to Stratford and inhabited New Place as early as 1614; and it is almost equally certain that, as Dyce observes, the 'preacher' who was regaled with wine at public expense, was no clergyman of the established church, but a Puritan, as the epithet 'preacher' distinctly shows. In whatever way the fact of this affair about the wine may be explained, we must at least assume, that no Puritanical preacher would have entered the house of a Papist or even of a man suspected of favouring the papacy, but as little, however, would he have entered the house of a carouser, in which drinking-bouts of this kind were held. It is more probable that Shakspeare, in the last years of his life—perhaps through the mediation

* His wife survived him seven years, and died on the 6th of August, 1623. Of his children, Hamnet his son had died in his twelfth year, as early as 1596. His daughter Judith was married in Feb. 1616, to Thomas Quincy, a wine grower and wine merchant in Stratford; their children, however, died young without leaving heirs. The elder daughter Susanna married Dr. John Hall in 1607, and left one daughter Elizabeth, who was first married to Thomas Nash, and after his death to Sir John Barnard, of Abington; in both marriages she was childless, so that with her, in 1670, the family of the poet became extinct.

of his Stratford friends and relatives, more especially of his daughter Susanna—came in contact with the Puritans of the town (and of course all the Puritans were not blind fanatics), and that he was thus induced, at the request of the town officials, to allow his spacious house to be used on the occasion of one of their meetings.

CHAPTER VI.

SHAKSPEARE'S PERSONAL CHARACTER.

WE unfortunately know so little about Shakspeare's life and character, that every single fact, preserved by chance or tradition, must be taken into consideration in order to form some idea of the man. It is for this reason alone that I expressly quoted the notice of the Stratford chamberlain, in our last chapter; it is sufficiently important even if it does no more than prove that Shakspeare cannot possibly have been believed to be a Papist. For Catholics in various quarters have endeavoured, by forged documents and false conclusions, in *majorem Dei gloriam*, to claim the great poet for the Catholic Church. In the year 1770, it was said that—hidden in the brick roof of the house which Shakspeare's father is supposed to have inhabited—there had been discovered a document, the testamentary confession of faith and sin, of a certain John Shakspeare, which could have been written only to prove the writer's sound Catholic faith. Malone at first considered it to be genuine, but soon discovered his mistake; and, in fact, it has so little internal and external credibility, that no unprejudiced person can any longer doubt its being a forgery. Even Catholic zealots, so concerned about the welfare of Shakspeare's soul, no longer venture to appeal to it. In place of it, however, the notice of archdeacon Davies, and more especially the already mentioned report of the recusant commission of 1592, have recently offered matter and occasion for again reviving the myth of the crypto-Catholicism of Shakspeare. Even Collier thought that the excuse which Shakspeare's father made for not having attended Church, as prescribed, was probably a mere device, as he thinks it inconceivable that Shakspeare, the son, should not, at that time, have been able to relieve his father of all money

difficulties. And yet we of course do not at all know how great was the amount of the father's debt, nor how great the son's income may have been about 1592. Moreover the excuse did not only refer to the year 1592, but to a longer period of time, as a mere temporary non-attendance at church could not suffice for establishing the offence of recusancy. But in addition to this Dyce* calls attention to the fact that John Shakspeare, as alderman, bailiff and chief alderman, had to take the customary oath, that is, to swear that he was not of the Catholic persuasion and not a member of the Catholic Church. This in my opinion settles the question as regards Shakspeare's father; the remaining empty hypotheses are not even worth mentioning.

And, moreover, we are not discussing the father but the son, and he, as is authentically established, was baptised in the Protestant Church of Stratford. He no doubt attended the grammar school of the town and received there his first religious instruction in the Protestant faith; the licence for his marriage (after the banns had been proclaimed but once) was obtained from a Protestant bishop, accordingly it was likewise celebrated in a Protestant church. What reason is there left for supposing him to have been a Catholic? But even if he had been born and bred a Catholic, we should obviously have to assume that, at a later date, he fell away from his father's faith. The way in which, in 'King John,' he describes the papacy, and clearly sides with the king against the arrogance of the cardinal's party, sufficiently proves that his heart was not moved by any sympathy with the Catholic Church and its love of dominion. The same feeling which is there expressed, agrees with what he says in 'Henry V.' and in the three parts of Henry 'VI.,' but more especially in 'Henry VIII.'—which was doubtless not written till towards the end of Shakspeare's life,—where the words: 'In her (Elizabeth's days) God shall be truly known,' alone decide the question. Nay, in fact all his works, especially 'The Merchant of Venice,' 'Measure for Measure,' 'Richard III.,' 'Macbeth,' etc., may be referred to, in order to prove how emphatically he

* *L.c.*, p 19.

everywhere points to the inmost essence of all religious life, to a purely moral sentiment, free from all arrogance and pride of conscious virtue, free from all justification by works and the letter of the law—trusting to the grace of God and the divine government of the universe.*

But whether and how far Shakspeare may have accepted the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican Church, is a question which of course is not decided by the above observations, and which in fact cannot be determined either from his poems, or from the scanty reports which we possess in regard to his inner life. This much only, I think, is evident from both, that his view of life generally coincided with the leading ideas of Christianity; this must be obvious to every one who has examined his poems without prejudice. I, for my part, however, believe that, in his latter years at least, he was personally attached to the specific Christian articles of faith, and that he also recognised them outwardly. This, in my opinion, follows with a great degree of probability from some perfectly authentic facts. First, from the already mentioned notice of the Stratford chamberlain which cannot well be otherwise explained, then from Shakspeare's decided preference for his elder daughter Susanna, who was generally known and honoured on account of her genuine piety. Her tomb stone expressly says:

“Witty above her sexe, but that's not all,
Wise to Salvation was good Mistris Hall,
Something of Shakspeare was in that, but this
Wholy of Him with whom she is now in bliss.”

Shakspeare's name would scarcely have been so directly connected with hers, if he had been considered an unbeliever, an atheist or pantheist. Moreover, his will commences with the words: ‘In the name of God, Amen.

* When contrasted with these facts, the tissue of false conclusions and hypotheses by which A. F. Rio (*Shakspeare, Aus dem französischen übersetzt von K. Zell, 1864*) has recently endeavoured to prove Shakspeare's Catholicism, appears so loose and untenable, that it scarcely deserves the clever refutation with which M. Bernays (*Jahrbuch der D. Shakspeare-Gesellschaft., i. 220 ff*) has favoured it.

I, William Shakspeare do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following; that is to say: first, I commend my soul into the hands of God my creator, hoping, and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting.' This may indeed have been the general and customary flourish for the beginning of a will, and yet from a man like Shakspeare the words possess a higher significance; it is impossible to believe of a man, on whose forehead the genius of true art and poetry, the genius of truth and beauty, has imprinted its mark, and who enjoyed a perfectly free position which released him from all considerations, that he should have commenced his will with a conventional falsehood.

Everyone will, of course, answer this doubtful question—which has long since become a controversy—from his own religious point of view. But in whichever way it is settled, at all events, a spirit of strict, pure, and impartial morality, which strikes all who choose to see it, and which first gives the religious sentiments that appear now and then their value and an impress of truth, pervades the poems of Shakspeare. It, however, requires no proof to show that Shakspeare, even though not a good Protestant, was no religious fanatic, no pietistic hypocrite, but doubtless free from all confessional narrow-mindedness. But it is a matter of importance to refute the objection of coarseness, immorality and godlessness which narrow minds still continue to raise against him on account of the equivocal jokes, the objectionable figures, the nudities and crudities of his representations (which, it is true, often enough offend our more sensitive feelings of propriety), without considering that the question, as to what was allowable in this respect, does not depend upon morality, but upon custom, not upon what is moral but upon the sense of propriety; and that the dramatic poet is not only justified—in order to secure dramatic action for his pieces—but to a certain extent obliged to conform to the customs of the times, both as regards language and the mode of representation. In the reigns of Elizabeth and James, manners were even much freer, the licence of wit and fun even much greater

than they appear in Shakspeare's poems, as might be shown by numerous facts and as is already proved by the much greater licences in which other contemporary poets indulged.

If we consider the course of Shakspeare's life as a whole, in connection with his moral character, we find it divided into the already mentioned four or five periods, and developing into a natural, progressive, organic structure, which would probably have assumed this form and no other, even in the absence of external influences. After the first youthful indiscretions and their consequences had been overcome, his external life—according to all that we know of him—passed by very quietly and peacefully, even though not without brilliancy and distinction. His was a truly poetical life, wholly devoted to free creation, and to the ever-advancing development of his art. Shakspeare was no minister of state, no professor, or any kind of official; he was not even a Court poet nor the associate of any Academy of arts or learned Society. He was simply himself, neither more nor less than a *poet*. This undisturbed freedom, this independence and contentedness was the foundation of his greatness. Like Sophocles, who, in many respects, was his near intellectual kinsman, he stood—supported by his art alone—on the boundary of two epochs, on the ground of a vigorously advancing civilisation, in the midst of a great, noble and highly gifted nation. He desired nothing beyond what his art demanded and furnished, nothing but to be able to give loud utterance to what he felt within himself and saw in the world around: the beauty and glory of creation, the power and fulness of the human mind, the energy and the weakness of the will, the purity and depravity, the courage and the cowardliness of the heart—the infinite majesty and the baseness of human nature. As Schlegel says of Sophocles, while seeking for the purely human, what was highest and greatest came to him of its own accord.

But the poet could not attain what was greatest and highest, without himself possessing a great and noble nature. 'Worthy, noble and beloved,' are without exception the epithets with which contemporaries adorn the name of Shakspeare, from Chettle, who is the first to

mention his personal celebrity, down to Ben Jonson's eulogy to his departed friend. That he deserved this praise is proved by the favour and friendship with which men like Southampton, Pembroke, and Montgomery personally honoured him. At all events, in spite of the seductive companionship of frivolous actors and theatrical poets, in spite of the increasing immorality of the metropolis—Shakspeare did not lead a very licentious life; this is attested by the considerable sums which he gradually laid by and spent in the most practical manner. It is also of greater importance than is generally supposed that even envious malignity could cast no stain upon so brilliant a spirit (even though not enviably happy), upon the most celebrated poet of his day, the favourite of two crowned heads, and the friend and darling of men in high and influential positions. Even the very fact of his outward life appearing to have passed so noiselessly, so entirely uninterrupted by remarkable incidents and events—bears witness to the firm and solid stamp of his character, to the peaceful, clear and pure air which his soul must have breathed. This is the more to be appreciated as, in a mind like Shakspeare's, where together with the mighty faculties and forces which were so vigorous, sensual nature with its desires and passions must have been equally powerful. When, in his poems, we hear the overpowering and penetrating sounds of a feeling as deep as it is strong, the surging and rushing of the most vehement desires, affections and passions, the ever-changing play of a rich and glowing imagination, we cannot but suppose that the poet actually experienced all that he describes with such vivid truth, or that he at least must have borne the seeds of them in his own breast; then, in fact, it seems to us marvellous that the moral force did, nevertheless, not lose its power over him.

That Shakspeare's dramas are throughout pervaded by a moral spirit—in spite of the fulness of sensual life, in spite of the power of the passions and emotions which they describe—and that the conception of life represented shows as much earnestness and depth, as pureness of mind, will be proved in subsequent chapters. Any direct *personal* relations cannot, however, be drawn from them except

by violent and arbitrary proceedings.* More important in this respect are his few lyric poems, more especially his Sonnets. We here see distinct traces of the pain and struggle it cost him to maintain a moral empire over himself. We see how he summons all his resolution to his aid, how his spirit rose and sank, and again rose on the wave of his rich inner life. We hear him exhorting—

“Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
Fool’d by those rebel powers that thee array,
Why doth thou pine within, and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?”
(*Sonnet 146.*)

or seeking to arm himself against the rebellious assaults of ‘sinful earth,’ against the tempestuous attacks of sinful desire and passion (*Sonnet 129*), calling “lust in action”

“The expense of spirit in a waste of shame,”

and endeavouring to wean his soul from its seductions by such glaring descriptions as :

“Perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight;
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
Past reason hated.” (*Sonnet 129.*)

We see how unweariedly he is in the pursuit of *truth*, and striving in his private life also to be absolutely true, recognising *eternity* in truth alone (*Son. 123*); and how, therefore, with sharp reproof he drives ‘the suborn’d informers’ from himself and his young friend (*Sonnets 82, 85, 86, 125*), asking himself in surprise :

“Why is my verse so barren of new pride?
So far from variation or quick change?
Why, with the time, do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange?

* How dangerous it is to pretend to take any of Shakspeare’s individual characters pre-eminently as the reflex of his own character, is proved by the very circumstance that one critic recognises features of the poet’s personal mind and nature in Hamlet, another finds them in Prince Henry, a third even in Falstaff.

Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a notèd weed?"

(*Sonnet 76.*)

We see that, in general, he was indeed imbued with a free, fresh energy of life, such as is reflected in most of his lyric poems. but that there were hours in which he fell into melancholy and painful despondency, and in which he complains that :

"My sun one early morn did shine
With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
But out! alack! he was but one hour mine,"

(*Sonnet 33.*)

—hours in which he pondered over the transitoriness of all human greatness, beauty and splendour (*Sonnets 64, etc.*). We see also that he was generally, it is true, inspired by a quiet, pure consciousness of his artistic greatness and masterly power (*Sonnets 55, 60, 63, 65, 81, 101, 107*), but that there were hours in which his works seemed to him empty, mean, and worthless, hours in which he gives way to 'a dream of self despair,'

"Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,"

(*Sonnet 29.*)

and where he laments that his Muse has not 'grown with a growing age' to bring a 'dearer birth,' where, in short, he 'in himself could nothing worthy prove' (*Sonnets 32, 71, 72*).

Especially interesting are the two *Sonnets* which stand in direct connection with those already quoted on p. 228-229; I place them here because they, more than any others, give us a deep insight into Shakspeare's soul, and bear witness to the fact of how high he personally stood, not only above his outward position, but also above his own works.

"Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affection new.
Most true it is, that I have looked on truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worse essays prov'd thee my best of love.
Now all is done, have what shall have no end:
Mine appetite I never more will grind

On newer proof, to try an older friend,
 A God in love, to whom I am confin'd.
 Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
 Even to thy pure and most most loving breast."
 (*Sonnet 110.*)

"Your love and pity doth the impression fill
 Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow;
 For what care I who calls me well or ill,
 So you o'ergreen my bad, my good allow?
 You are my all-the-world, and I must strive
 To know my shames and praises from your tongue;
 None else to me, nor I to none alive,
 That my steel'd sense or changes, right or wrong.
 In so profound abysm I throw all care
 Of other's voices, that my adder's sense
 To critic and to flatterer stopped are.
 Mark how with my neglect I do dispense:—
 You are so strongly in my purpose bred,
 That all the world besides methinks are dead."
 (*Sonnet 112.*)

The first of these Sonnets is already met with in Jaggard's pirated edition, which appeared in 1599. Hence it may have been written between 1595 and 1598; and the second Sonnet, therefore, no doubt also belongs to the same period, for it is obviously only the consoling conclusion, after a comforting and loving answer from his friend. As these two Sonnets show, Shakspeare's poems, even after 1592, seem still to have experienced various kinds of censure and attacks. That he should 'have gone here and there,' before he hit the right medium, before he fully and clearly recognised the truth—whether this confession be referred merely to the youthful indiscretions of his life, or even to his youthful productions—is the fate of almost all great minds, which can go no other than their *own* way; and that he should 'have made himself a motley to the view,' 'gored his own thoughts' and 'sold cheap what is most dear' is the confession of a truly poetic mind, which was well aware that his heart's best blood was flowing in his poems, but that the world was incapable of appreciating the best that was offered to it, and so corrupt as to tread upon what was noblest. However, this poetic mind at the same time says: 'these blenches gave my heart another youth;'—the eternal youth of art and of

love lives in his heart;—the same poetic mind feels itself far above the praise and blame of the blind multitude, and nothing can move his 'steel'd sense' but the judgment of the noblest and most intellectual; their love and friendship he finds to be the true anchor of his life.

In fact, the love and friendship of noble-minded men seems to have been the most invigorating and most refreshing spring of life for Shakspeare's soul. They perhaps were a compensation for the domestic happiness which, either his own fault or misfortune had embittered. Of no other poet, of any age or nation, is recorded such an ardent love of friendship as is expressed in Shakspeare's Sonnets. They are full of the tenderest and most touching proofs of self-sacrificing devotion; and genuine friendship is a sure proof of genuine nobility of soul. Besides the young man to whom the Sonnets are addressed, Shakspeare had a number of friends who, as far as we know, were entirely worthy of him. He lived on intimate and affectionate terms with his fellow actors Burbage, Hemminge, and Condell; this is proved by his will, as well as by their edition of his collected works. Augustin Philipps, also a member of the Globe company, left him in his will a thirty-shilling gold piece as a token of his esteem and love; and John Fletcher—although a man of an entirely different nature and a poet of the Ben Jonson school, was nevertheless on such intimate terms with Shakspeare that, as Skottowe says, it is not thought unreasonable to consider them the joint authors of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' (a Fletcherian tragedy). Shakspeare, Ben Jonson and Fletcher, were possibly the leading members of the club at the Mermaid, which was joined by many wits and scholars of the day, such as Beaumont, Selden, Cotton, Carew, Martin and Donne. Beaumont, in a letter to Jonson, speaks with delight and admiration of "the words which he heard at the Mermaid, so nimble, so full of ethereal fire, as if each had cast all his wit on a single jest." It cannot indeed be maintained that all these were Shakspeare's friends in the highest sense of the word; his friends, however, they no doubt were, although it may seem strange that in his poems

he has not devoted a word of remembrance or of praise to any one of them; Jonson alone is mentioned in some lines at the end of some poems collected by Rob. Chester. But in place of this he has raised the most glorious monument to friendship in several of his dramatic characters (for instance, Horatio in 'Hamlet,' Kent in 'King Lear,' etc.), more especially, however, in 'The Merchant of Venice.' Besides this, from an already quoted observation of Meres', we may safely assume that several of his smaller poems addressed to friends, must have been lost.

At all events, Shakspeare was on very intimate terms with Ben Jonson. But this very intimacy has become the subject of a great many critical investigations and controversies, as, naturally, the right understanding of this intimacy is a matter of importance as regards the characters of the two men. If it be true that the first piece which Jonson presented to the Globe was about to be returned to the author unexamined, when upon Shakspeare's recommendation it was accepted and performed, this circumstance may have laid the foundation of their more intimate personal acquaintance.* After Shakspeare's death Ben Jonson composed the eulogy (to which we have frequently alluded) which is prefixed to the folio edition of Shakspeare's works, and which at the same time is a kind of elegy on his departed friend. Jonson also wrote a eulogistic inscription under his portrait, and is perhaps likewise the author of the laudatory preface to the folio edition. Why, therefore, should we not believe him, when several years after Shakspeare's death he affirms that 'I loved the man and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any'? All that admits of any question is how much intrinsic, *objective* truth may have existed in this friendly relation between the two men who, in their profession, their aims, and activity, were at the same time decided rivals and opponents? Malone and others believe that Ben Jonson thoroughly hated and envied Shakspeare; but this reckless accusation of the heart of one whose mouth had affirmed the contrary, is manifestly a

* Gifford (*B. Jonson's Works*, London, 1816, i. p. xliii. ff.) questions this statement of Rowe's, but without any reason whatever, as Collier (*Life of Shakspeare*) has satisfactorily proved.

mere conjecture. Gifford,* the excellent editor of Ben Jonson's works, endeavours, on the other hand, with great partiality to turn everything to the advantage of his author. But if we carefully examine all that is known of Jonson's life and character, it is not difficult to discover in what his ingenious advocate has erred. In how far Jonson was right and at the same time wrong, in his æstheticocritical opposition to Shakspeare, will be more fully discussed in the following chapter. He was right in so far as every new and necessary tendency in the history of the human mind is justified in trying to assert itself in opposition to all the splendour and glory of the past; he was wrong in so far as he did not see that the new spirit which he represented had in fact already found acceptance in Shakspeare's poems; and that all which he had thought wanting or censured in regard to form, actually existed, or was to be considered an advantage. He was also right in thinking himself three times as learned as Shakspeare; but it is not with erudition that poetry is composed, nor with mere theories that actions are accomplished. As long, therefore, as, in spite of his firm conviction of being in the right, he had the worst of it in the contest with Shakspeare, no doubt his esteem and appreciation of his rival was mixed with the bitter feeling that injustice was being done to himself, a feeling which, in his nature, would border very closely upon envy. His intellect might have highly valued the great poetic talent as well as the personal worth of his rival; but his love for him was probably clouded by a general ill-feeling towards the whole position and tendency which Shakspeare represented and maintained. This must be the conviction of every unprejudiced mind who, in Jonson's earlier pieces, reads his harsh attacks upon the actors and the poets of the popular theatre to which Shakspeare belonged. At a later date, however, when Jonson had met with more success, this bitter feeling may have become less violent; and when Shakspeare had retired altogether from the scene, no doubt the love and esteem which Jonson had always felt for him may have shown itself in its true clearness and purity. As regards Shakspeare's great and noble dis-

* Gifford, *l.c.*, i. p. ccli. ff.

position, on the other hand, I feel convinced that he invariably recognised what was able, honourable, and great—even though onesided—in Ben Jonson's character. Shakspeare, although he was the party assailed, might at a later date have had reason to feel annoyed by the increasing predominance of the tendency which his friend represented, but there is not the faintest trace of his having suffered himself to be prejudiced against his worthy opponent. Whether, however, Shakspeare's warm heart, whether a disposition like his, rich in feeling and fancy, could have felt itself *especially* drawn to Ben Jonson's very opposite nature, I am inclined to doubt. Their friendship seems in general to have been of a kind similar to that which existed between Goethe and Herder, that is, founded more upon mutual esteem and upon that mysterious sympathy which pervades the most jarring differences of character and unites all great minds, than upon any personal affection.

How great the internal contrast between their natures was, is shown by a trait of character which has been preserved of both men, which, indeed, by many is considered as unimportant, but in my opinion is so characteristic that I cannot pass it over unmentioned, especially as we know so little of Shakspeare's sympathies and antipathies, of what he was personally fond and preferred, and for what he possessed the taste and interest. I allude to the very different relation in which both men stood to *music*, the sister art of poetry. How intensely Shakspeare loved music, how highly he appreciated it, how deeply his inmost soul was imbued with it, is proved by so many and unequivocal passages in his works, that there can be no question as to this predilection, to this characteristic trait of his nature. I shall in the first place quote the lovely sonnet from 'The Passionate Pilgrim':

"If music and sweet poetry agree,
As they must needs, the sister and the brother,
Then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me,
Because thou lov'st the one, and I the other.
Dowland to thee is dear, whose heavenly touch
Upon the lute doth ravish human sense;
Spenser to me, whose deep conceit is such,
As, passing all conceit, needs no defence.

— 'Thou lov'st to hear the sweet melodious sound
That Phœbus' lute, the queen of music, makes;
And I in deep delight am chiefly drown'd,
Whenas himself to singing he betakes.
One god is god of both, as poets feign;
One knight loves both, and both in thee remain."

Although the poet here sings from the depths of his own heart of the close relationship between poetry and music, he still more clearly bears witness to his intense personal love for music in the 128th Sonnet, where he calls his beloved herself 'my music.'

"How oft, when thou, my music, music playst,
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks," etc.

In 'The Merchant of Venice,' in the famous passage of Act v. 1, Lorenzo goes so far as to maintain that nothing is

"so stockish, hard, and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature.
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted."

In a similar and very significant manner Portia speaks in honour of music, when, at the most important moment of her life, she calls for its assistance:

"Let music sound, while he doth make his choice;
Then, if he lose, he makes a swan-like end,
Fading in music."

Prospero, in 'The Tempest,' causes a 'solemn air to be played as the best comforter to an unsettled fancy;' and it is applied for the same purpose by the physician in 'King Lear,' to restore harmony in the aged king's soul. Shakspeare weaves music and song into almost every one of his comedies, but also into several of his tragedies ('Hamlet,' 'Othello,' 'King Lear,' 'Richard II.,' etc.), and is especially fond of those old plaintive popular songs

with which he was so well acquainted, and knew so well how to estimate.

But it was not only a decided preference connected with the deeper knowledge of the æsthetic value of music, the representative of 'harmony' *par excellence*; Shakspeare seems also to have possessed, in an unusual degree, the power of judging and understanding the theory of music, that upon which the performance and execution of music depends. In 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' (i. 2), one of his earliest comedies, where the heroine of the play is conversing with her maid, there is a passage which enters so fully into the manner of how a song should be sung, that it seems to have been inserted intentionally to exhibit the young poet's knowledge in this branch of the art; and Burney draws attention to the fact that the critic, who in the scene referred to, is teaching Lucetta Julia's song, makes use of no other expressions, but such as were employed by the English as *termini technici* in the profession of music.* Perhaps Shakspeare was an accomplished musician himself; perhaps he not only discoursed in verse, but occasionally gave utterance to the tender sentiments of his excitable heart, to the stormy emotions of his soul, in the sweet notes of music. At all events, as Burney points out—his enthusiastic predilection, his profound understanding and emphatic praise of the high spiritual significance of music, is all the more remarkable and characteristic, the lower the position occupied in those days by music and musical culture in England.

Ben Jonson in this, as in almost every other respect, was a decided contrast to Shakspeare; at least we infer this from the character of his works. How little taste he, at all events, seems to have possessed for music and the musical form of beauty, is proved even by his expressed preference and over-estimation of ancient art, which, in its thoroughly plastic character, forms a direct contrast to the musical form of beauty. In none of his dramas does he speak in praise of music, in none do we find inserted any of those popular songs which Shakspeare

* Burney: *A General History of Music*, etc. London, 1789, iii. 336 f.—F. Förster: *Shakspeare u. die Tonkunst, Jahrbuch d. Deutsch. Shakspeare-Gesellschaft*, 1867, p. 175.

so frequently introduces.* In Jonson's works the lyrical element is, in fact, distinctly left in the shade, and although the so-called masques, of which he wrote so many, were in all cases furnished with music, and may be said to have represented our modern *vaudevilles*, still those verses of his which are intended to be accompanied by music are so little musical, owing to their frosty allegories and learned allusions, etc., that they clearly prove how small must have been his understanding of the nature of music. He, in this respect, represented, as it were, the English stand-point as regards music, for that the English nation possess but a very limited degree of taste and talent for music, is admitted even by the English themselves. Shakspeare, on the other hand, owing to the eminently musical feature of his nature, appears related to the German mind; for it is as universally acknowledged that, in the domain of music and lyric poetry, the palm is due to German art, and that these two branches of art especially correspond with the mind and character of the German people.

There is another point in which the contrast between the characters of Shakspeare and Ben Jonson seems to have been sharp and distinct. Fuller says: 'Many were the wit-combats between Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. I behold them like a Spanish great galleon, and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid but slow in his performances; Shakspeare, like the latter, less in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention.' Rowe and Aubrey also extol Shakspeare's very ready and smooth and pleasant wit; Aubrey calls it, very appropriately, comic without ridicule, and witty without affectation. The few examples, however, which tradition furnishes in proof of its own truth, give us but

* Except in his Court tragedy, *Cynthia's Revels*, in which nothing but gods and allegorical figures are represented, and Cupid plays the principal part—we but seldom in his pieces meet with songs to be sung and accompanied by music, and the few that occur (in the *Poetaster*, *Volpone* or *The Fox*, *Epicene* or *The Silent Woman*, *The Sad Shepherd* and *The Case is Altered*) are exactly of the same stamp as the now popular and so-called couplets, that is, their character and subjects are not musico-lyrical, but comico-satirical.

a meagre idea of the most charming gift of conversation which we may lay to the credit of Shakspeare. Only one anecdote therefore may be given here, as perhaps, accidentally it is more authentic than the others. Rowe and Aubrey relate: 'that he had a particular intimacy with Mr. Combe, an old gentleman noted thereabouts for his wealth and usury: it happened, that in a pleasant conversation among their common friends, Mr. Combe told Shakspeare, in a laughing manner, that he fancied he intended to write his epitaph, if he happened to outlive him, and since he could not know what might be said of him when he was dead, he desired it might be done immediately, upon which Shakspeare gave him these four lines:

"Ten in the hundred lies here ingrav'd;
'Tis a hundred to ten his soul is not sav'd:
If any man ask, 'Who lies in this tomb?'
'Oh! Oh!' quoth the devil, 'tis my John-a-Combe.'"

As the poet's heart kindled readily with the purest glow of friendship, it was doubtless no less susceptible to the troubled flame of love. Shakspeare's marriage continued, indeed, to exist externally, but the internal bond had probably to some extent become weakened, after he left Stratford. The free habits of the metropolis which he entered as a young man of twenty-two, without any one to counsel or befriend him, bordered close upon licentiousness as regards the intercourse of the sexes. It can therefore scarcely be wondered at if Shakspeare also was led into excesses of all kinds. Yet we know only of two individual cases to justify a doubt as to the strictly moral character of his life. Thus Shakspeare, on his annual journeys between London and Stratford, in passing through Oxford, was in the habit of always lodging at the Crown Inn, and as the hostess was a beautiful and intellectual woman, and her husband an admirer of Shakspeare and of dramatic art, these visits naturally gave rise to all kinds of malicious rumours. But even tradition itself does no more than give vague hints and suggestions.* Accordingly this supposed love

* The frequently-mentioned William Davenant (subsequently Sir William Davenant), the son of the woman accused of infidelity, is indeed

affair was probably nothing more than a perfectly harmless, poetical diversion, a mutual pleasure which the poet felt in the company of an amiable woman and *vice versâ*. What would life be without this mutual attraction of congenial minds and sympathetic hearts?

More doubtful, however, is the singular relation which appears to have subsisted between Shakspeare and the beautiful woman, to whom allusion is made in several of his Sonnets.* The poet tells us that it was his misfortune to love, where the loved one proved faithless. He as often describes the loveliness and seductive grace of his charmer, as her unworthiness. He says:

"For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night,"
(*Sonnet 147.*)

and then says to himself in surprise,

"In things right true my heart and eyes have err'd,
And to this false plague are they now transferr'd."
(*Sonnet 137.*)

The coquetry and infidelity of the loved one appears also to have disturbed the friendly relation existing between him and his 'sweetest friend,' for it was he who won the love of his lady. This is most clearly expressed in Sonnet 144 (in connection with numbers 133 and 134), I shall therefore give it entire.

"Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still :
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman, colour'd ill.

on one occasion, in the company of good friends and a glass of wine—said to have confessed that he considered himself an offspring of the great Shakspeare. But intimations of this kind bear witness of themselves of an impure and frivolous character. Davenant himself, afterwards a dramatic poet and director of a theatre, of course claimed to have great poetical talent, and it may therefore have been very acceptable to his vanity to be regarded as a son of England's most famous dramatic poet, which Shakspeare was even in his own day. Dyce, *l.c.*, therefore also rejects his testimony as completely untrustworthy.

* Sonnet 127 ff ; compare also 40-42.

To win me soon to hell, my female evil
 Tempteth my better angel from my side,
 And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
 Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
 And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend,
 Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
 But being both from me, both to each friend,
 I guess one angel in another's hell.
 Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
 Till my bad angel fire my good one out."
 (Sonnet 144.)

Yet even in this case again the poet exhibits the self-denying power of his friendship, he restrains his own feelings and takes his friend back again to his heart with the warmest love and increased affection (Sonnets 40-42).*

But it may now be asked, whether and how far—apart from the other Sonnets—real experience, real persons are here represented? Why should not the poet have invented all these interesting circumstances? Why should he not perhaps have poetically embellished the unimportant occurrence between him and his young friend, and worked it out into a small lyrical drama? Beyond all question such *may* have been the case, and yet I am convinced that it was not so. All the other sonnets in the collection dedicated to Mr. W. H. refer, in my opinion, to actual circumstances, relations and events, and only represent the continued internal and external intercourse between the two friends, so that it would be a very arbitrary proceeding to detach a single member from the whole, and to transplant it upon entirely different soil. Besides this, I should not like to miss the significant traits of character in the life of the great poet, which these very Sonnets give us. How could Shakspeare have been Shakspeare, how could he have written his 'Romeo,' 'Othello,' 'Antony and Cleopatra,' his 'Macbeth,' 'Richard III.,' his 'Merchant of Venice,' and 'Measure for Measure,' had he not in his own life, and in his own breast experienced the power of sensual desires, the mighty, mysterious charm of evil? Listen to him asking himself in dismay:

* Although these three Sonnets occupy different positions, and stand in a different connection, still there can be no doubt to their applying to the same circumstance.

"Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
 That in the very refuse of thy deeds
 There is such strength and warrantise of skill,
 That, in my mind, thy worst all best exceeds?
 Who taught thee how to make me love thee more.
 The more I hear and see just cause of hate!"
 (Sonnet 150.)

This is the magic power of sensual beauty, which is so wonderfully described in the old German tales *Der getreue Eckart*, and *Der Venusberg*. This is the seductive, the apparently poetical charm of evil; it was this delusive appearance of a boundless liberty, this unconcerned security and lightness which—free from the fetters of the law,—lends the stamp of grace to every movement and every expression; it was this which Shakspeare—taught by his own experience—wished to hold up as a warning to his friend. That he did this so frankly and openly, however, at the same time proves what every unprejudiced mind can read between the lines, that evil had indeed seduced, but not enslaved him, that he had wrestled and fought, but that he conquered in the end. He who longs for liberty as ardently as Shakspeare does in Sonnet 134, has already emancipated himself, and is already free.

Be this however as it may, I by no means intend to maintain that the description of this love affair is historically true and devoid of all poetical embellishment. But as little is it my intention to set up Shakspeare as a perfect hero of virtue; he in all likelihood was occasionally weak in that point where we are all so weak.* Let it only be borne in mind that the passion of love and the magic power of beauty arise directly from the susceptibility of feeling and imagination which the poet must possess in an especially eminent degree, and that consequently the

* The anecdote (in Collier, *i.e.* from the already mentioned *Diary* of the years 1601–1603 discovered by him, and probably belonging to one of the members of one of the Inns of Court), that Shakspeare once anticipated and represented his friend Burbage in an assignation, sounds somewhat fabulous, and has merely the value of an anecdote. Still, it comes from a source, against which we can aver nothing, because we know nothing, and hence it may contribute a minimum to the half-proofs of what has been said above.

poet is more exposed to such temptations than other sons of Eve. Besides which, we must take into consideration the natural affection of highly gifted women for artists and poets, into whose arms they have frequently thrown themselves of their own free will. Lastly, the age in which Shakspeare was affected by this weakness, was just the very brilliant and most joyful period of his life, the time of a poetic intoxication, in which all the chords of his being were vibrating at their utmost stretch, and every pulse throbbing violently with vital energy and love of life.* Let the stern moralist, therefore, judge humanely, and let the individuality of the accused be taken into consideration; otherwise justice and its verdict will fall asunder in dead abstraction.

Shakspeare's moral character, the depth and fulness of his ideas, the power of his creative imagination, were no doubt supported by a corresponding degree of mental culture, and fulness of *knowledge*. The old prejudice that his was an uncouth, unrefined poetical nature, has long since been recognised to be a prejudice even by English critics, and indeed it rested upon too slender foundations. In the first place many were influenced by the sharp reproaches raised by Ben Jonson and others of his stamp, against Shakspeare's want of learning, knowledge and culture, without considering that, between the Jonsonian erudition and common ignorance, there are a great number of very respectable intermediate stages. Ben Jonson might from his point of view be perfectly justified in maintaining that Shakspeare understood little Latin and still less Greek; and yet it is no contradiction when Aubrey, who like Rowe collected current stories, anecdotes and characteristic traits about Shakspeare—reports that he understood Latin pretty well. The former judged by a strictly philosophical standard, the latter by the general standard of educated men. Shakspeare may, accordingly, have been quite well able to read the Latin poets and prose writers in the original, without our attributing a falsehood to Ben Jonson; for there is a wide difference between the mere under-

* That this love affair took place about 1599 is proved by the fact that the 138th Sonnet is already met with in Jaggard's edition of the *Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599.

standing and the thorough scientific knowledge of a language. The same was unquestionably the case in regard to his acquaintance with the French, and perhaps also the Italian language. As regards the former, 'Henry V.' alone furnishes an ample proof, which Drake* has completed from various other quarters. That it must have been an easy task to a mind like Shakspeare's to acquire a sufficient knowledge of Italian to read and understand it, is at once obvious from its close affinity to Latin and French; and that he did learn it, seems in so far very probable, as the subjects of many of his pieces are drawn from Italian novels, and he must have soon discovered of what advantage to his poetical activity, would be the knowledge of a language whose literature at that time was the richest in the world. G. A. Brown† has compared the earlier works of Shakspeare (such as 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' and others) with 'The Merchant of Venice,' 'Othello,' 'The Tempest,' and 'Much Ado about Nothing,' and endeavoured to prove that Shakspeare must himself have been in Italy before writing 'The Merchant of Venice' (in 1597), by showing that in the play there occur such special, correct and accurate descriptions of Italian localities, manners and customs, as could only have been written by an eye-witness. He also draws attention to the fact that not only are the individual Italian phrases that occur every now and again, perfectly correct, but that the story from the *Pecorone*, which Shakspeare makes use of in the 'The Merchant of Venice,' has not been found to exist in any contemporaneous English translation. Moreover J. L. Klein‡ has recently pointed out with absolute certainty from some scenes in 'Romeo and Juliet' that Shakspeare must have read *Hadriana*, a tragedy by an Italian named Groto, and consequently, that he not only understood Italian, but was acquainted with Italian literature.

Still it remains doubtful how far Shakspeare's philosophical knowledge may have extended; but even the

* I. 54 f.

† *Shakspeare's Autobiographical Poems*, etc. London, 1838, pp. 104-117.

‡ *Geschichte des Dramas*, vol. v.

dullest pedant must admit that he could be a great poet without being a philologer, and therefore we may agree with Dr. Farmer in assuming that he understood no Greek, little Latin and Italian, and not much more French, even though Farmer, in his admired 'Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare,' has in fact only proved that Theobald's, Warburton's, and Upton's inadequate testimonies prove little or nothing to the contrary. At all events, it was unjust, because of some geographical, historical and chronological inaccuracies to accuse him also of the grossest ignorance of facts. It no doubt may seem strange to English and German scholars that Shakspeare in one of his fantastic comedies ('The Winter's Tale') should make Bohemia a maritime country, accessible to ships from Sicily, and Raphael's great pupil Julio Romano (who died scarcely twenty years before Shakspeare's birth) a contemporary with the Delphic oracle, Theseus and Hippolyta (in 'The Midsummer Night's Dream') with Oberon and Titania; Aristotle (in 'Troilus and Cressida') with Hector and the Trojan heroes; that, in another similar comedy ('As You Like It') he fills the Ardennes Forests with the lions and serpents of Africa; that he sends Prince Hamlet to the University of Wittemberg, which was founded several centuries after his death; that, in 'Henry VI,' he should make Richard, Duke of Gloucester, speak of the yet unborn Machiavelli, and in fact, that he causes, not only Hamlet's Danes, not only King Lear, Macbeth, and Henry V., but also his Romans and Greeks, to speak and act in the very spirit of the sixteenth century, of gunpowder, cannons, printed books, etc. And it is very possible that Shakspeare knew little or nothing about Bohemia; for does not R. Greene, the M.A. of Cambridge and Oxford, in his story of Dorastus and Fawnia—upon which 'The Winter's Tale' is founded—likewise speak of Bohemia's sea-coast; and the subsequent Prime Minister of France, the Duke de Luines, when ambassador in Bohemia, enquired when there, whether the kingdom was an inland territory or situated on the sea; in fact geography was not taught in those days, and was only a subject of private study. Nevertheless it is still very doubtful whether Shakspeare did not intentionally

insert these supposed proofs of schoolboy ignorance, in order at once to place the spectator in the proper point of view, in order, that is, to intimate that his poems had their roots in the free, shifting soil of fancy, that they were not intended to represent common reality, but life in a different aspect, from a different point of view and in a different light, in short, to raise the spectator above the work, worry, anxiety and all the small interests of daily life, into the sunny regions of poetry.

The intentions, however, which Shakspeare carries out in 'Hamlet'—whatever they may have been—could obviously be realized only by Hamlet being of as lofty and meditative a mind, struggling for freedom of thought and action, as he appears in Shakspeare, but which he could not possibly appear in the old northern story, of which he externally reminds us. This is why Hamlet was lifted out of his real lifetime and why a more civilised period is made the basis of the drama; this is why Hamlet studies at Wittenberg, the most enlightened university of the sixteenth century and the champion in the struggle against the attempts of Catholicism to suppress freedom of thought and faith. Poetry, as already remarked, is wholly indifferent about mere outward times; it concerns itself only with the inward time, that is, with the character of the times; and this is strictly observed in 'Hamlet,' in 'King Lear,' in 'Macbeth' and in all his plays. It is somewhat similar as regards the other anachronisms; when Hector appeals to Aristotle, Shakspeare very likely only meant this ludicrous passage to ridicule the equally unfounded and ludicrous passages from Aristotle, which Ben Jonson and the learned critics of his stamp, perpetually had on their lips. And when Richard III. alludes to Machiavelli's *Principe*, it is very possible that the poet merely wished, in poetical brevity, to give a name which would at once characterise the matter spoken of. Tyranny and political selfishness have existed at all times, but it is Machiavelli who has drawn the maxims of such a policy with the sharpest and most characteristic strokes. His name, therefore, stands merely as the representative of the thing, the name itself being of as little importance to poetry, as all mere names.

Shakspeare, at all events, knew his public; he did not require to excuse himself to the great multitude for having allowed some historical and geographical errors to creep in. He perhaps also wished to inform enlightened men and scholars, that he was not acting the part of an historian, but the part of a poet of history, hence, that he did not heed individual and temporary truth, but the general, poetical truth of history, that, in fact, he had no intention of describing Danes, Scotchmen, Romans, Frenchmen, and Italians of any definite period, but men such as they are at all times, and moreover in such colours and outlines as would be perfectly familiar and intelligible to his public, and thus produce the greatest effect upon them. Besides this, Shakspeare might, in his day, take liberties which could now, no longer be conceded to a poet. For in those times more was not demanded of the drama—except by the small circle of scholars by profession—than what it could and ought to afford, that is, a lively excitement of the feelings and imagination, and recreation, to the spirit, by raising it above common reality into a sphere where the poetical powers of nature and of the human mind, predominate. Accordingly, in order to attain the greatest possible dramatic effect, all means were considered allowable, every blunder in history, geography, and chronology was granted if only the thing, the situation, the person in question, were thereby clearly defined, accurately characterised. That Shakspeare in this sense, intentionally indulged in such blunders, is intimated by himself, when he makes the fool in ‘King Lear’ address the learned carper with the evidently satirical words: ‘This prophecy Merlin *shall* make; for *I live before his time.*’

In truth Shakspeare’s practical knowledge was very extensive for those times, as Drake has proved with certainty. He shows* that Shakspeare had read a great deal of the Italian and French literature of the day, that he was very well acquainted with the best known Latin and Greek authors, and that, in all probability, he had also studied critical works, such as Wilson’s ‘Rhetoric’ and others. He likewise shows† that Shakspeare was equally well read in the chronicles and histories of England as

* *L.c.*, i. 473 f.

† *I.* 484 f.

well as in those of classical antiquity, and as intimately acquainted with Pliny's 'Natural History,' as with Batman's 'Gothic Pliny,' which is an imitation of the former. Lastly, he points out * how well versed Shakspeare was in the overflowing abundance of songs, romances, ballads, and stories, which had been introduced into England by translations, from all the different European countries, and were current among the people. He was equally familiar with the language and subjects of the Old and New Testaments, as has been recently pointed out,† for almost every page of his writings contains expressions, similes, comparisons, etc., from the Scriptures. But it was not merely from books that Shakspeare drew his knowledge of nature, of life, and of history. He was not merely what every great poet is, a keen, attentive observer of nature, but, in his works there occur so many technical expressions belonging to the different trades of common workmen, as well as of those appertaining to the business of educated men—more especially such an intimate acquaintance with jurisprudence and the forms of its practical application—that they have furnished English critics with material enough to establish more definitely those traditions, which aver that Shakspeare lent his father a helping hand in his wool-trade, in glove-making, and in the slaughtering of calves, and that Malone came to the conclusion that Shakspeare, in his youth, must have worked for some time in an attorney's office. Others, owing to his singular acquaintance with the state of the medical profession in his day, have conjectured that if he did not himself study medicine, he, at all events, must have been on intimate terms with doctors and apothecaries. But he seems likewise not to have been unacquainted with philosophical questions and enquiries; for there was recently discovered in the British Museum, a copy of J. Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essais*, published in the year 1603, which bears Shakspeare's name in his own handwriting together with the date 1603. Moreover a passage in 'The Tempest' (II. i.), which is taken almost word for

* I. 591 f.

† Ch. Wordsworth: *Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*. London, 1864.

word out of the thirtieth chapter of the first book of the *Essais*, proves that Shakspeare not only procured the work of this most ingenious French philosopher of the sixteenth century, but that he had himself studied it.

If in conclusion, we ask, what Shakspeare owed to his circumstances in life, to his nation and his age, we have here again to answer, little, and yet much. *Little*, in so far as he bore within his own bosom what was best and highest, kept it pure and refined, tended it carefully, and developed it rigorously. *Much*, in so far as, in the first place, his personal circumstances—which resulted directly from youthful indiscretions, and led him to London—were very favourable for the development of his poetic genius. The rich, diversified life of the metropolis gave him opportunities for studying the world and mankind, for gathering experience and knowledge, and for satisfying heart and mind with the fulness of existence. His free position opened up to him a boundless horizon, an unclouded view into the whole breadth and depth of the present, whereas the thought of wife and child, and a helpless father, laid upon him the necessary check, and prevented him from losing himself in the midst of this freedom. The poverty which at first oppressed him, no doubt strung and strengthened his mental faculties. Fortune had denied him hereditary distinction in life, he had to toil and struggle for whatever of the world's glory he wished to call his own. This, however, did not cause him to wither in that passionate selfishness, wilfulness, defiance, and arrogance, which darkened the soul of Lord Byron, and veiled true beauty from his eyes in a troubled cloud; Shakspeare did not sink into that broad, contemplative ease, which lives for self alone, and is so apt to lay hold of those that are fortunate and to prevent their best works from attaining the highest degree of greatness, power, and solidity, because it is toil and effort only, which develop, strengthen, and steel the energies of man. While Shakspeare, in endeavouring to work his way upwards, probably spent his days in peaceful yet energetic activity for his profession, he at the same time obtained, through the acquaintance of distinguished men of all ranks—more especially his friendship with historical

characters, such as the Earl of Southampton, Pembroke, and Montgomery, who took part in the events of their age—a direct and vivid insight into the questions, ideas, and tendencies, which agitated the times, and into the hidden springs of history and politics—an insight of which no study could supply the place to a poet. Even the, probably, never quite settled dispute with his learned friend Ben Jonson, was doubtless of some advantage to him; for the sharp censure of the critic may have washed off many a blemish from his poems, which, however, Shakspeare himself never regarded as perfectly finished, but was ever revising and correcting.

How much the spirit and character of the age, the mighty advance of the English nation under Elizabeth, customs and mode of life, etc., may have contributed to the development of Shakspeare's genius, I have already intimated at the commencement of Book II. And yet Shakspeare stands in a very different relation to his age than, for instance, Calderon, Goethe, Schiller, Tieck, and others, do to theirs; and this is a circumstance which has hitherto been almost entirely overlooked. The latter, in their works, more or less adopt the *special* ideas, the prevailing tendencies and aims, views and interests of their nation and age, and reflect these with a poetical halo. Shakspeare, on the other hand, allows only the *general* spirit of the age to influence him; he, in all cases, adopts from his age and nation only what is common to all men, and is influenced only by it. This, it is true, he represents in the colours and contours of his nation and age; for that which is common to all men requires a definite outline and a concrete form, in order to be artistically portrayed. But, on the other hand, we find scarcely a trace of the *special, one-sided* tendencies which prevailed in the England of the sixteenth century. Shakspeare as compared with Goethe stands in a position diametrically opposed to the latter in his relation to his own time. For while the latter* describes special features of the physiognomy of his day, under essentially general forms, Shakspeare invariably clothes what is common to all men, in the special forms of the life of his century and nation. And whereas

* *Die natürliche Tochter, Den Aufgeregten, Der Gross-Cophta*, etc.

Goethe adopts, and in himself, lives through the essence and spirit, as well as the individual motives of the hurry and pressure of the present, and works these out into poetical compositions, Shakspeare stands on a free height above them, and is apparently wholly uninfluenced by them.

Even the great discord between Catholicism and Protestantism, which at that time still affected all minds, is scarcely alluded to (emphatically at least) by a single word in any of his works that are acknowledged to be genuine; the struggle itself he has not taken up at all in his works. As little did it occur to him to make the ever-increasing moral, ecclesiastical and political differences between the Puritans and the adherents of the Episcopal Church, the subject of one of his dramas, or to make use of them as motives; scarcely can any covert allusions to them be detected. In a political respect he indeed follows the general current of love and admiration for Elizabeth; he is monarchical in his sentiments, and his reverence for the divine right of hereditary majesty is undisguisedly expressed in several of his pieces. And yet he has not made use of the existing and rising political differences manifest in the public life of his day, for any one of his poems. It is only the general idea of the state in its moral significance, and in its different forms, the nature of monarchy and chivalry, of aristocratic and popular government that he has attempted to portray in some of his historical dramas. There are, of course, jokes about and allusions to many of the tendencies of the age, to traits of character, ideas and opinions, manners and customs of the people, but no entire poem is ever founded upon them.* It is only as regards his art, more especially the new form which Ben Jonson and his successors attempted to introduce into dramatic poetry, that he has made

* His *Hamlet*, for instance, seems to contain references to the life and character of James I., as K. Silberschlag (in *Prutz's Museum*, 1859, i. 50± f. 808 f.; 1860. i 132 f.) has pointed out. *Hamlet*, in fact, is especially rich in allusions to the culture, language, spirit, and character of the time in which it was written. Compare, B. Tschischwitz: *Shakspeare's Hamlet in seinem Verhältniss zur Gesamtbildung, etc., der Elisabethischen Zeit*; Halle, 1867.

an exception. In this respect, more than one of his pieces has the intention of combating the new and of defending the old, but always only as a *secondary* object. The actual poetical intention invariably rises far above it, and possesses an entirely *general* interest, as may be seen in 'Troilus and Cressida,' which play I have principally had in view, in making these remarks. Thus in this respect, also, his poems retain the quiet, virgin purity, the pleasing absence of all design, and the lofty, ideal independence, which, from all we know of Shakspeare, also distinguished his personal character.

BOOK III.

SHAKSPEARE'S DRAMATIC STYLE IN RELATION TO
THAT OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREENE-MARLOWE OR SHAKSPEARIAN SCHOOL.

A. Munday, H. Chettle, Thomas Heywood, Dekker, Haughton and Day.

THE character of a poet is historically dependent partly upon the state of the development of the art upon which he enters, partly upon the character of his nation and century. In the preceding portion of my work, I have endeavoured to characterise Shakspeare from both points of view. And yet in the case of a genuine poet these influence his *poetic* peculiarity only in so far as they are the conditions and levers of the development of his *human* individuality. As a man, like every other organic member of his nation, and its history as a whole, he is subject to the conditions of every human existence. As a poet, on the other hand, the greater he is, the more independent he will appear of the special, one-sided interests, tendencies, and ideas of his age, the higher he will soar above the special development of art which he found existing, and the more clearly will the eternal idea of beauty, the general nature of art and poetry be reflected in his works. The great artist belongs to *all* times and to *all* nations: this imperishableness and general truth of his creations—the sign of his greatness—is, so to say, the actual kernel

of his works, and accordingly, if it is to be correctly perceived and correctly estimated, must be specially brought forward and separated from the perishable shell which encloses it. The manner in which Shakspeare—in accordance with his individuality—conceives the spirit and nature of poetry as opposed to the character of the sixteenth century, of the English people, and of the prevailing conditions of art, the peculiar form in which the idea of beauty, and the conception of dramatic art is expressed in himself, and in his works—this he is in his inmost nature, this is the poetical genius of Shakspeare.

He is out-and-out a dramatic poet, as is proved even by the few non-dramatic works of his, which we possess. For in his lyric pieces, the 154 Sonnets, and the small collection under the title of 'The Passionate Pilgrim,' he not merely unfolds his own personal character, he not merely depicts the state of his own heart, but as distinctly the character of those (real or fictitious) persons to whom the poems are addressed; it is only in describing his relation to them, that his own individuality is set forth. These Sonnets, moreover, are to a certain extent of an epigrammatical nature, rich in play upon words and antitheses, in wit and humour, are also, it is true, distinguished by the pure poetical effusions of sentiment and the harmonious echo of external life in the susceptible nature of the poet—of which the essence of lyrical poetry consists—but still more by a fulness and depth of thought and reflection. The poems argue so much and so often, that many of them are more like *speeches* than lyrical Sonnets; nay, most of them might be called *dialogical*, in so far as the remarks and counter-remarks, the maxims and opinions, as well as the whole peculiarity of the person to whom they are addressed, are invariably heard with the rest. Hence they can be understood only in the internal connection by which they are linked together; taken singly, most of them would appear obscure. His other smaller poems, 'Venus and Adonis,' 'The Rape of Lucrece,' and 'A Lover's Complaint,' which have unjustly been termed epical—they might far more properly be called idyllic (i.e., *edyllion*, in the ancient and original sense of the word, a small poetical picture in narrative verse)—are so dramatic in design,

colour, and composition, that they seem to require nothing but dialogue, to be transferred into another domain of poetry. Lastly the fourteen strophes of four and six lines recently discovered by Collier among the MSS. at Bridge-water House,*—which are subscribed with the initials W. Sh., and probably intended as a kind of lottery—and the two epitaphs upon Sir Thom. Stanley—which, according to Dugdale, were written by Shakspeare,† and which to judge from form and character were probably written by him—may be reckoned among the small gems, which occasionally issued from his great poetical laboratory.

Now in order correctly to estimate Shakspeare's style, that is, the manner in which he conceived and carried out his ideas of dramatic art, and the peculiar form in which his works present it to us, we must, in the first place, understand the problem which the condition of art in his day placed before him, and then ascertain the position which his associates and fellow-labourers occupied in regard to the common goal; further we shall have to explain the manner in which he himself endeavoured to solve the great problem, and, lastly measure his artistic activity by the highest standard of all art, thus ascertaining how much art was promoted by his solution of the problem. It is only after having done this, that we shall be able to decide whether Shakspeare was more than a mere talented man, even though ever so great. For mere *talent* can be estimated only in connection with the historical development from which it arose, only by being compared with what others accomplished contemporaneously, that is, only by a relative standard; otherwise we should be doing it an injustice. *Genius*, on the other hand, has the right to demand that it shall not be judged only by the standard of its day and the natural state of art, but also by the external ideal of all art, and the right to demand that it shall be classed with the greatest heroes of all times and of all nations.

The problem which was set before the poets of the Shakspearian age, *i.e.*, before the successors of Peele,

* *New Particulars regarding the Works of Shakespeare*. London, 1836, pp. 61, 64 f.

† Dyce, *l.c.*, p. 109.

Greene, and Marlowe, we have become acquainted with from the historical part of our first Book. What we there said, may be repeated here in a few words: their task was to blend the *romantico-fantastico-idealistic* character which still clung to art from the Middle Ages, with the rational *realistic, historical* spirit of modern times into one organic whole, and to find for this subject, its adequate dramatic *form* of art. For if the drama is the poetical delineation of the *historical* life of man, then poetry could no longer, as in the Middle Ages, be allowed to move in an ideal world beyond this—whether it were in that of the past which belongs to the epos, or in that of the future which is tangible only in a lyrical form; it was the *present*, that is, *actual, natural* and *historical* life in its internal, poetical character, that had to be grasped and raised into its ideal, that had to be brought into its appropriate, artistic form. History, however, can as little be *poetically* reflected unless, with the prophetic eye of fancy, it is found to contain an *ideal* object and an *ideal* agent for its movements, as it can be described in a *really historical* form, unless it is regarded with the eye of sober *realistic* understanding, and exhibits the common, natural forces which are at work in it. The artistic *form* which was to correspond with a subject poetical as well as historical, *i.e.*, with the true conception of the drama, had accordingly not merely to fulfil all the demands of *art* and of the idea of *beauty*, but at the same time also to realize all the claims of *history*, of real historical *truth*. This form could be discovered only by a mind which not merely bore within itself the full wealth of a truly poetic, ideal conception of the world, but also the true understanding of actual, historical life. Our whole enquiry, accordingly, reduces itself to the simple question. in how far did the poets of the Shakspearian age succeed in laying hold of this *form*, and how near, or how far, were they from this goal?

In order to answer this question we must distinguish well between two diverging tendencies, or Schools among the poets of Shakspeare's time: the one attached itself more closely to the *traditional* form of art and hence held

more directly to the spirit of the *Middle Ages*; the other, on the contrary, turned more to the spirit of *modern times*, and hence stood in opposition to the earlier tendency and its further development. Although but few minds may have been conscious of this discord, it existed nevertheless as becomes evident upon a closer examination of the dramatic literature of the time. We shall for brevity's sake call the first tendency the *Greene-Marlowe* or, as Shakspeare at first attached himself to it, the *Shakspearian School*; the second, the *Ben Jonson School*, as it more especially arose with him. The former included most of Shakspeare's older contemporaries who were about the same age as himself, such as Anthony Munday, Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, Drayton, Day, and others; the latter included most of his younger contemporaries, and probably also recruited itself with deserters from the older one. Among their number, besides their leader, I more especially include Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Ford, Nath. Field and others. Midway between both Schools, at first standing by the Shakspearian, subsequently more or less decidedly in favour of the Jonsonian School, we might place Chapman, Middleton, William Rowley, Marston, Webster, and others. But in general features, even Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger, now and then come pretty close to the Shakspearian style, for, naturally the boundaries between the two Schools cannot be drawn with mathematical accuracy.

Of the above named poets of the Greene-Marlowe School, *A. Munday* and *Henry Chettle* (the former born in 1553, the latter probably not much later) are indeed about ten years older than Shakspeare, but he was survived by both, by the former certainly, and by the latter probably, by several years. They at first attached themselves directly to Greene's, and respectively to Marlowe's style. At least Chettle's '*Hoffman*,' a tragedy founded upon a politico-criminal story, the scene of which is laid in Germany, bears a strong resemblance to Marlowe's conception of the tragic; the same delight in infamous deeds and horrors, the same exaggerations in the delineation of character and in the action, the same inclination to the unnatural, in short,

almost all Marlowe's defects, but not all his excellencies. Munday's 'Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon,' etc.,* on the other hand, seems very much of the same style as R. Greene's best pieces. It is furnished with a great variety of deeds, events, changes of fortune, etc., which appear arranged one by the side of the other, more in an epic than a dramatic style, overladen with action, all is more in the manner of a sketch than fully developed; even the emotions and passions can scarcely get in a word, and express themselves as briefly as possible. In the same way the characters are only indicated, and show their peculiarities far more in what they outwardly do and suffer than by what they utter from the inner life of their souls; in this manner of characterisation, however, they are delineated with a firm hand, and consistently maintained. The whole piece is pervaded by the romantico-poetical fragrance of a forest-silence where (with the exception of the first scenes) the whole piece is played. This fragrance, that is, the tone of mind called forth by a chivalrous life in the forest and chase—seasoned with all kinds of adventures—is, as it were, the soul of the piece, the mood from which it has arisen, and which it again awakens in the soul of the spectator. Not a trace of any profounder view can be discovered.

Another drama of Munday's—the continuation of the one printed under the title of 'The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, with the lamentable Tragedie of chaste Matilda,'† likewise printed in 1601, but probably written later than the latter, and in conjunction with Chettle—presents a somewhat different character. It is dramatically more effective, more fully developed, does not consist merely of action, but also contains sentiment, passion and thought; the characters are more fully and sharply drawn, and more perfectly worked out; the language is freer, the blankverse more regular, more rhythmical, more sonorous. I think that both action and characterisation show traces of the influence of Shakspeare's genius. As regards the composition, however, it is decidedly inferior to his first piece.

* Printed in London, 1601, but doubtless much older than the first print. Reprinted in Collier's *Five Old Plays*, etc.

† Reprinted in Collier, *l.c.*

For in reality, as even the title intimates, it is divided into two perfectly distinct dramas, and of these the second again into two separate halves, inasmuch as the first act represents the tragic death of the Earl of Huntington, and the last four acts describe, partly the misfortunes of his wife 'the beautiful and chaste Matilda,' partly the story of the family Bruce, more especially that of Lady Bruce and her youngest son, a story which is a mere external appendage to the play. Thus while the general tone in the 'Downfall' gives the whole an internal and, so to speak, an invisible unity and diffuses a pleasing harmony, nay, a certain gracefulness over the movement of the action, in the latter case, the whole is torn asunder and patched up. Munday and Chettle were obviously incapable of combining the more powerful, more violent and shriller tones of mental life—when affected in its inmost depths by tragic pathos—into the trichord of a fundamental note; the tragic powers which they had unfettered, but were incapable of controlling, burst the delicate bonds of the beauty of form.

Like Munday, *Thomas Heywood*—that extremely popular dramatist, who during his poetical career, within about forty years (from 1593-1633), as he himself says,* 'had either an entire hand or at least a maine finger amongst two hundred and twenty dramas,'—exhibits a certain mental affinity to R. Greene. And yet he may be regarded as the chief representative of the earlier or Shakspearian School, if Shakspeare (as must necessarily be done) is separated from the School to which he stood nearest, and is placed above both parties. For while the common small-ware which Heywood brought to the theatrical market for daily use, suffers from the same carelessness and superficiality, from the same defects of diction, composition and characterisation, as are found in most of Greene's pieces—without ever possessing their merits in the same degree—his better works are distinguished not only by greater depth and intensity of feeling, but particularly by a more earnest striving after an organic rounding-off of the material, and a higher form

* Preface to his *English Traveller*, 1633. In Collier's *O. P. being a Continuation*, etc., vi, 108.

of the composition ; in this he rises above Greene's standpoint. Thus, for instance his 'Edward IV.,' which was printed in 1600, but entered at Stationers' Hall, as early as 1591, and which, at least to judge from its title, treats of exactly the same subjects,* is still very different from the ingenious, and, in general, poetical as well as historical conception of history, met with in Shakspeare's better dramas. The mediæval chronicle style is not yet quite overcome ; the epic element and the narrative tone, at times still involuntarily shows itself, especially where actual political occurrences form the subject of the representation ; the events still appear arranged in chronological succession, thus Richard, afterwards the Third, although a principal agent in the whole catastrophe, does not appear till very late, that is, not till in the last half of the second part. It is more the private than the political life of Edward, that is here dramatised, and even the great political and historically most important events are treated more in the spirit of a biography than as history. In the first part, at least, Falconbridge's rebellion is much less prominent than the king's meeting with Hobs, the tanner of Tamworth, and his love-affair with Jane Shore, the beautiful wife of the London goldsmith ; and even in the second part, although as a whole it is more historical in character, 'the lamentable death of Jane Shore' is made the principal theme. These portions are excellent of their kind, full of characteristic features, as poetical as they are psychologically true, full of tender feeling and significant thoughts, whereas the state occurrences, for instance, the war with France, the intrigues between the Duke of Burgundy and the Earl of St. Paul, and the sudden and perfectly unmotivated treaty of peace, are treated so completely in the childish naïve tone of the ancient chroniclers that they almost partake of the comic. Yet the two parts into which the historical matter is divided are more perfectly rounded-off into one complete whole—inasmuch as Edward's personality and the spirit of the whole give all the individual parts their own peculiar stamp—and the piece shows far more historical

* Specially published at the expense of the Shakspeare Society by Barron Field in 1842.

earnestness, than for example is found in Greene's
 P. 'James IV.'

In like manner 'The four Prentises of London,'* one of the oldest, perhaps the oldest extant play of Heywood, which to quote his own words had been written in his 'infancy of judgment in this kind of poetry,' seems at first sight to be still entirely in Greene's style; the same epic arrangement, in accordance with which the wonderful adventures of at least five persons are treated with equal care; the same mass of material consisting more of events than of actions; the same kind of characterisation describing external peculiarities rather than the internal life of the soul; the same easy, flowing diction which only occasionally inclines to bombast. However the piece in regard to composition stands a degree higher than Greene's dramas. It is distinguished from the latter, by the fact that in him, not only is this atmosphere, this general tone of mind—which in Greene has to supply the place of the unity of conception—the means of connecting the whole representation, but that this tone of mind, so to speak, seems worked up to a concrete conception, which, indeed, does not as yet, by any means, embrace all the individual parts of the whole, but which, nevertheless, by means of gentle outlines, gives that general, and in itself uncertain tone of mind, a peculiar stamp. I mean, that this piece possesses not merely the general, picturesque and distant fragrance of a romantic, adventurous and chivalrous life, which pervades the whole and gives it a certain, general unity of character, but that this general tone is, at the same time, individualised by definite thoughts, which are reflected in the fortunes of the four heroes, and moreover that in a free, poetical form of life—such as was peculiar to the chivalry of the time of the crusades—moral power, youthful daring, courage and strength of character, necessarily get the better of all adverse circumstances and misfortunes. This thought is distinctly expressed in the principal portions of the action, inasmuch as the four sons of the exiled Duke of Bouloigne (Bouillon), deprived of their duchy and their dignity as knights, appear in the first instance as apprentices to different London tradesmen, but in the

* In Dodsley, *l.c.*, vi. 401 ff.

end, after having experienced the most manifold misfortunes and adventures, quit the stage as victors in the first Crusade, and conquerors of Jerusalem, each with a crown on his head, and their sister as the bride of Prince Tancred.

In a few other of Heywood's pieces we meet with a similar endeavour to give Greene's style of composition more solidity and a more definite character; I must add a few remarks in regard to these so as to characterise his style somewhat more accurately. The first I have in view is 'The Royal' King and the Loyall Subject,' which was indeed not printed till 1637, but was doubtless also one of Heywood's earlier works.* The main action in this case turns upon a series of tests, which the King of England imposes upon the obedience and fidelity of his, in every respect, distinguished marshal, or, if it be preferred, upon the king's and his general's rivalry in love and generosity. In this case also the separate tests are introduced in long succession, one after the other, and their accumulation, the continual repetition of the same game, which recommences in the fifth act, after the reconciliation of the two men, is somewhat monotonous and wearisome. Here, also, two different actions proceed one by the side of the other; in addition to the main action we have the story of Captain Bonville, which externally stands in no connection whatever with the former. But internally both are connected by a certain ideal affinity, and in this affinity the poet expresses a definite intention. For in the same way as the king tries his marshal's love and devotion, Bonville tries the fidelity of his betrothed and that of his friends by representing himself as having returned from the war against the infidels, more a beggar than a rich man. And in the same way as the marshal passes splendidly through all trials, Lady Mary's love is proved to be genuine, pure gold, inasmuch as she remains faithful to her lover contrary to the commands of her father. This parallel distinctly intimates the poet's intention of representing

* Reprinted for the Shakespeare Society, 1850, in Collier's *O. P.*, being a *Continuation*, etc., vi. 225 f., together with *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.

the nature of true love and fidelity in two different subjects. This, however, gives the composition a certain resemblance to Shakspeare's mode of composition; except that the fundamental idea is not grasped deeply enough to penetrate equally through all parts; there is not diversity enough in the development, and this consequently produces the wearisome monotony. The piece is also wanting, as already said, in external and real connecting links between the two subjects—which Shakspeare never omits to add—and hence it falls externally into two separate parts.

It is much the same as regards the second drama, of which I wish to say a few words. Its title is 'A Woman Kilde (killed) with Kindness,' the third edition of which appeared in 1617.* The principal theme in this case is the seduction of a young and beautiful woman (Mrs. Frankford) by a false, ungrateful friend of her husband, and the manner in which the latter, by his magnanimity, his goodness and kindness, causes the erring wife to feel such deep and desperate remorse, that she dies of sorrow. If we overlook the fact that the crime in question is not sufficiently motivated in a psychological point of view, inasmuch as Wendoll and Mrs. Frankford, although in themselves noble natures, fall from their height without any intermediate stages, whereby the development of the action is rendered somewhat abrupt, defective and unnatural—if we leave this certainly important defect out of the question, it will be found that the theme is extremely well worked out. The diction possesses a natural grace, flowing easily and harmoniously, and tones of deep and genuine feeling not unfrequently touch the heart like music. The characters are well contrasted and, in an animated action, are as consistently developed as correctly drawn; it is only as regards the delineation of the more violent mental emotions and passion, that Heywood does not seem to have had sufficient talent.

In this case also there is again, by the side of the main action, a secondary one played by Sir Francis Acton, Sir Charles Mountford and his sister. It is externally, scarcely at all linked with the former, for the whole connection

* Reprinted in Dodsley, *l.c.*, vii. 227 ff.

consists merely in Mrs. Frankford being Acton's sister, and in her marriage being made the cause of the enmity between Acton and Mountford. Internally, however, both subjects again exhibit a certain mental affinity; for the secondary action likewise turns upon Acton's love for Mountford's sister and upon his attempts to induce her to sacrifice her chastity out of love for her brother, whom he has ruined and thrown into a debtor's prison. It is only the end that is different: Acton is overcome by Susanna's devoted sisterly love and her courageous chastity, so that, carried away by love and admiration, he pardons her brother and offers her his hand. While, therefore, the main action ends tragically, the secondary action resolves itself into joy and gladness as in Comedy. However, this contrast was necessary, in order to permit the ruin of erring, and the exaltation of victorious, female virtue being reflected, and thus to carry out the poet's intention. But it is self-evident that this thought is partly too abstractedly moral, partly a mere commonplace which loses its effect if—as in the present case—without any reference to the general moral forces, prevailing in the state and nation, it only represents the entirely individual life of a few persons. In other words, the fundamental thought is again not profoundly enough conceived, and too superficially worked out to give the piece the full effect of the tragic, and that internal organic unity indispensable to a genuine work of art; externally at all events, the piece again falls into two distinct parts.*

Thomas Dekker—who is mentioned fifteen times in 'England's Parnassus,' and accordingly, at about 1600 must have been a generally known and acknowledged

* Of the two pieces which have become known through the Shakespeare Society: *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* and *Fortune by Land and Sea* (Edited by Barron Field. London, 1846), the former is an earlier work of Heywood's (first published in 1607) and composed quite in the style characterised above; the latter, on the other hand, one of his later dramas which he wrote in conjunction with W. Rowley, has something forced in its whole conception (an elder brother disinherited by his father, on account of a discreditable marriage, and in the service of his younger brother, is evidently an unnatural situation, and offensive to one's feelings), and already appears infected by the subsequent degenerate taste. ✓

author, and therefore, must probably have commenced his poetical career before 1590*—shows a great deal of resemblance to Heywood in his earlier pieces, except that his diction possesses more brilliancy and power, his figures more bone and sinew, and hence, a more marked individuality, his thoughts more acuteness and precision. His ‘Old Fortunatus,’ for instance, a piece which appeared in print in 1600, but was upon the stage as early as 1595,† possesses many poetical beauties, although by the conclusion, which ends in a coarse piece of flattery to Elizabeth, it degenerates into a Court comedy. (This conclusion, however, according to Henslowe’s ‘Diary,’ p. 161, is probably only a later addition.) The description of the love of Orleans for the beautiful Agrippina, the expression of genuine depth of feeling in her, combined with the characteristic humour and strange freaks of an excited imagination—such as are peculiar to love—is highly successful, so that Charles Lamb is perfectly right in maintaining that his drawing may well be placed by the side of Shakspeare’s finest pictures. Moreover, it is a beautiful and ingenious feature, that ‘Vice’ should free the two murderers of the sons of Fortunatus from their sentence of death, so as to leave them to the torture of the pangs of their own consciences. The characters of the two sons, the principal heroes of the play—Andelocia, a careless, pleasure-seeking fool, and Ampedo, a morose hero of virtue, who, in his stoicism, despises the whole world as a dark, inaccessible den of vice, whom, however, Virtue herself finally disowns—are excellently drawn. ‘Shadow,’ the clown of the piece, is as excellently described. The language, although nowhere highly poetical, is nevertheless attractive and expressive throughout, and in some passages possesses a euphony, which reminds one of the music of Shakspeare’s diction; even the often far-fetched, and yet in general extremely appropriate similes have something Shakspearian about them. It is only as regards the composition that the play does not rise above Heywood’s standpoint.

This piece, indeed, also makes the attempt to form the

* Meres also, in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598), and Munday, Chettle and Heywood mention him among the better English dramatists.

† *Old Plays, being a Continuation, &c.*, iii. 107 ff.

general, fantastico-poetical mental state of life, which is raised above common reality, and borders upon fairy-land, and pervades the whole piece, into a concrete fundamental idea. But this idea, that, for instance, fortune may govern the lives of men, but that virtue will triumph at last, is partly too general and abstractedly moral, partly less expressed by the action itself than by the allegorical figures introduced. Moreover, the play possesses one of Heywood's defects, inasmuch as it falls externally into two successive halves, of which the first represents the story of old Fortunatus, the other the fate of his sons, more especially that of Andelocia. In general, owing to its subject, its allegorical figures, and its moralising tendency, it stands too close to the mediæval idea of the drama, and too far removed from the spirit of modern times to help in solving the problem in question.

Very closely allied to 'Fortunatus,' but already freer from the influences of mediæval art—being devoid of allegorical figures, devoid of magic and sorcery—is 'Patient Grissil,' also one of Dekker's earliest pieces, which, according to Henslowe (p. 96), he composed in conjunction with Chettle and Haughton, and which was on the stage as early as 1599, but not printed till 1603.* It would prove an excellent example of his own and his fellow-workers' dramatic talents, as well as of the manner in which the better of Shakspeare's younger associates endeavoured to enliven the representation of contrasting subjects by comparison, and at the same time to obtain a certain bond of unity through the contrasts themselves, in so far as they mutually promote and supplement one another—if only the old legend were not so altogether opposed to being treated dramatically.

In another of his pieces, 'The Wonder of a Kingdom,' first printed 1636, but probably also one of his earlier works,† Dekker, it is true, gives a proof of his talent for conceiving poetical characters and situations: Fiametta, the heroine of the play, full of Italian fire, full of daring courage and quick decision, has her name from her actions; Angelo, her lover, is a worthy pendant to Orleans in 'Old Fortu-

* Specially published by the Shakespeare Society, London, 1841.

† Reprinted *l.c.*, iii. 13 ff.

natus,' but is more vigorous and more energetic; the two rich noblemen Torrenti and Gentili, who employ their wealth very differently, are extremely well contrasted, and even Torrenti, although a libertine and a spendthrift, nevertheless has a touch of the poetical in the energetic reckless grandeur with which he indulges in vice; his brother, the unfortunate maritime hero, would no less prove a genuinely poetical character, if it were more fully developed. However, as regards composition, the piece is decidedly inferior to 'Fortunatus.' It is in fact only a collection of poetical characters brought into all kinds of interesting situations and relations with one another; but these various kinds of threads run along together without coming externally into contact; of a fundamental idea connecting them internally—a design in the texture—there is no trace. At all events I cannot perceive what the story of Torrenti and Gentili has to do with the love affairs of Angelo and Fiametta, Tibaldo, Alphonsina, etc., nay, even the latter stand in no kind of connection with one another. The same may be said of Dekker's 'Honest Whore,' printed in 1604,* a piece which, according to Henslowe's 'Diary' (p. 232), he wrote in the same year in which it was printed in conjunction with Middleton.† Here again we meet with a quantity of heterogeneous subjects, the separate scenes and characters are in general rather successful, but there is no trace of an internal unity, and even the external concatenation is but very loose and superficial. And yet the piece is of a somewhat different stamp, in so far as it already approaches the modern spirit, which proceeded from Ben Jonson and his school. Dekker appears subsequently to have devoted himself more and more to this tendency; even the second part of 'The Honest Whore' (1608) ‡ shows only but very slight differences from the manner in which the followers of Ben Jonson comprehended dramatic art and life.

* Reprinted in Dodsley, *l.c.*, iii. 221 ff.

† Middleton, in my opinion, probably had but a very small hand in it; the piece at least bears the stamp of Dekker's style. However, A. Dyce has given both portions of the piece in his edition of Middleton's works (iii. 1 ff.)

‡ In Dodsley, iii. 329 f.

Dekker, from the very commencement, seems to have wavered between Greene's and Marlowe's style. The tragedy 'Lust's Dominion or the Lascivious Queen,' which he wrote in conjunction with *Day* and *Haughton* in the year 1600,* was long considered to be a work of Marlowe's, and in fact shows great affinity to him both in spirit and in style.† But Marlowe, as remarked, in many respects already indicates the new aspirations and exertions made in the spirit of modern times. Those of Shakspeare's contemporaries who are more closely allied to him, must therefore have been more readily affected and carried away by the more recent tendency; their number may have included, among others, *Day* and *Haughton*.

* Compare Chalmers in Dodsley, ii. 311. Collier, *Hist.*, iii. 96. Henslowe's 'Diary,' 165.

† It first appeared in print in 1657, and is reprinted in the above-mentioned edition of Marlowe's works, part iii.

CHAPTER II.

TRANSITIONS TO THE BEN-JONSON SCHOOL.

G. Chapman. Th. Middleton and Rowley. J. Marston and J. Webster.

AMONG the earlier and more distinguished poets *George Chapman* must be especially mentioned as Marlowe's successor, by the side of Chettle. He was somewhat older than Shakspeare (born in 1557, d. 1634), had studied at Oxford, which however he left in 1576 or 1578 without having taken a degree, and was noted for his moderation and strict morality. In Freeman's epigrams (1614) high praise is given to his originality, his unaffected style and the gentle stroke of his 'inambitious pen,' in which he is said to have closely resembled the grace of the comic Muse of the ancients. Meres, as early as 1598, enumerates him among the best English 'tragic poets;' Henslowe mentions one of his pieces in 1595, and accordingly he must have begun to write almost contemporaneously with Shakspeare, Heywood and Dekker.* And indeed it was probably tragedy that especially suited his talent and his earnest and strict disposition. This is evident from his two best pieces: 'The Conspiracy of the Duke of Byron,' and 'The Tragedie of the Duke of Byron,' of which one, at least, existed as early as 1602 and was printed in 1609. However both of these, and still more so his 'Bussy d'Ambois,' manifest a strong inclination to Marlowe's conception of the tragic; except that in the first named piece it more closely resembles the mediæval romantic spirit of the old English drama, the second piece, however, already appears affected by the more recent spirit of Ben Jonson and his School.† In those earlier works of his also, there is indeed

* See G. Chapman: *The Iliad of Homer*, edited by the Rev. R. Hooper. London, 1865, vol. i. p. iii. f.

† When Mézières (*Contemporains et successeurs de Shakspeare*, p.

likewise a predominance of that striving after what is grand, mighty and extraordinary, but still it is checked by the laws of beauty and harmony, and therefore only testifies to the great and powerful mind of the poet. In 'Bussy d'Ambois,' on the other hand, which was printed in 1607,* this striving is already exaggerated beyond all measure and bounds; power degenerates into ferocity and atrocity, severity into cruelty, evil into devilry, and the tragic into the horrible. Moreover, the action is surrounded by a quantity of superfluous additions, which in themselves are extremely simple, nay, even poor; for the piece turns merely upon the amours between d'Ambois and the Countess of Montsurry, which are as rapidly commenced as discovered by the husband of the Countess, and destroyed by the death of the guilty parties. As regards the composition, Chapman, in fact, does not rise above Marlowe's standpoint. In like manner the language, especially again in 'Bussy d'Ambois,' has much empty pomposity and rhetorical pathos, only rarely interrupted by tones of genuine feeling and passion; and as regards characterisation, there is no dearth of those strange combinations, and sudden unmotivated turns, or rather transformations of the characters, which Marlowe is fond of employing as levers to the action. (For instance, the confessor of the countess

213 f. 384) places him *completely* on Ben Jonson's side, and thinks that Chapman, like Jonson, followed the models of the ancients, and that he endeavoured to raise the classic drama and the antique tendency, he has allowed himself to be deceived by a certain similarity between Chapman's and Jonson's diction, and the former's delight in long, reflecting discourses. As regards his composition, which is after all the main point, we do not, in his tragedies, meet with any resemblance to Ben Jonson and the classical school, and only at a later period, in his comedies, does this tendency become distinctly apparent. F. Bodenstein, in his excellent essay, *Chapman in seinem Verhältniss zu Shakespeare, Jahrbuch der Deutsch. Shaks.-Gesell.* 1865, p. 304, very justly remarks that, all that which is eminent in his dramas must be essentially attributed to his great epic talent; that his descriptions are excellent, and his narratives have a vivid appearance of reality, that he abounds in beautiful maxims and fine remarks, but that he is entirely wanting in all dramatic elasticity as well as in the gift of allowing characters to develop before the eyes of the spectator.

* Reprinted in *Old Plays, being a Continuation, etc.*, iii. 235 f.

speaks, with the perfect seriousness of conviction, about religion and Christian virtue, but nevertheless plays the part of a pimp, acts as an exorcist, is intimately acquainted with Behemoth, the prince of Darkness, and finally commits the absurdity of playing the ghost throughout the whole of the fifth act, without accomplishing anything. And Monsieur, brother of the King of France, suddenly changes from being a friend and admirer of d'Ambois' chivalrous and heroic greatness, into his most bitter opponent and a devilish wretch.)*

Chapman, in his comedies (at all events in those written after 1605) enters more decidedly into the Jonsonian conception of dramatic poetry. In the prologue to his 'All Fools' (1605),† he indeed complains:

" Yet merely comical and harmless jests
(Though ne'er so witty) be esteemed but toys,
If void of th' other satyrisms' sauce ;"

and in the piece itself he makes his age the reproach that it finds pleasure only in mockery and slander. Chapman sets himself up against this, but involuntarily falls into the same error. His 'All Fools' is intended to represent the whole world in the form of a great madhouse; but his madmen are more like immoral, coarse fellows who look upon honesty as stupidity, falsehood and deception as

* *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, doubtless one of Chapman's later works—which was probably not published before 1622 (first printed in 1654), and recently re-edited by K. Elze: *G. Chapman's Tragedy of Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany, edited with an Introduction and Notes, etc.*, Leipzig, 1867—is indeed interesting on account of the remarkable knowledge of the German language, German habits, customs, and state institutions, but otherwise an extremely weak production, not an historical drama, but one of those bloody, horrible tragedies of revenge, which Kyd's *Jeronimo* and Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* seem to have called forth by the dozen. It is written in the spirit and style of the new School, whose main object was to rivet the attention of the spectators by a complicated, well or ill devised intrigue. It is sufficiently characterised by the first scene alone, where Alphonsus causes his learned secretary to explain to him the principles of the Machiavellistic policy (which is taken almost word for word from the *Principe*); these he notes down like a schoolboy, but directly afterwards not only tears the paper to pieces but poisons his instructor, so that no living person should know of his plans and objects; and yet he had not even divulged them to his secretary.

† In Dodsley, *l.c.*, iv. 109 ff.

cleverness, and adultery as a joke; or they are (like Gostanzo and Cornelio) utterly devoid of consistency and character, mere weather-cocks in the poet's hand. The intrigue is well planned, it is true, and, with the exception of the conclusion, is carried on easily and cleverly. But as everything turns only upon sexual crimes, upon adultery and again adultery, the piece finally seems to be but a detailed satire upon marriage, or at least upon all jealous husbands valuing the honour of their wives; to them is offered in plain words the comfortless truth that, as matters are, infidelity is unavoidable and not to be prevented by jealousy. The prosaic coarseness of this idea of life, which forms the basis of the whole play, destroys all the good qualities of the piece, the rapid, animated movement of the action, the flowing, clever language, and the ready and usually appropriate wit, which, however, is but too monotonously slippery.

Chapman's later comedy, 'The Widowe's Tears' (1612),* is of a similar kind. For whereas in 'All Fools' the faithlessness of wives forms the theme and is drained to the very dregs, here it is the inconstancy and frivolity of widows that is made the subject of ridicule; the lowness of the idea of life—according to which women, without exception, are but the contemptible playthings for the commonest sensual desires—is the same in both cases. In both pieces, as in 'Bussy d'Ambois,' the characteristic feature of the Ben Jonson School—which reduces the drama into a mere reflection of common reality—is unmistakable.

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley—two younger poets who wrote much in conjunction—appear to have pursued the same course as Chapman, Marston, Webster, and others.† The oldest yet known printed piece by Middleton

* Dodsley, *Lc.*, vi. 119 ff.

† Middleton was descended from a good family and was born in London about 1570; probably, at least, no earlier. He died in 1627. It is possible that the strange and fantastic piece entitled, 'The old Law,' was brought upon the stage as early as 1599, as is intimated by a passage in Act ii. 1. However, according to the old print of this drama, belonging to the year 1656, it was written by Massinger, Middleton, and Rowley (perhaps only revised by Massinger); but, how much is to be attributed to Middleton cannot, as Dyce very justly remarks, by any means be decided. See, *The Works of Th.*

belongs to the year 1602, the first written by Rowley, to the year 1607; probably however, both were engaged in composing for the stage at even an earlier date. Middleton's 'Mayor of Quinborough,' first printed in 1661, but doubtless one of the poet's earliest works,* is written quite in the romantic, epic style of Greene's or Shakspeare's 'Pericles.' It, in general, treats of the same semi-legendary, semi-historical subject described in 'The Birth of Merlin,' but conceived from a different point of view. The latter is also worked out in the same spirit; hence, if it were a work of W. Rowley's (which, however, I as little believe as that Shakspeare had any hand in it),† these two pieces—which are so much alike—would show that both poets entered their dramatic career at one and the same point. And yet both subsequently quitted the path upon which they had originally started. Middleton's 'A Mad World, my Masters,' a comedy which appeared in print in 1608,‡ already wavers in style and character between the old and newer schools. The idea of the play is intimated by the title, but Middleton's mad world consists only of a rich, good-natured, but vain and pleasure-seeking grandfather—who still indulges in the excesses of youth—and of his frivolous and dissolute grandson, who imposes upon the old man in all kinds of amusing ways, and is himself finally imposed upon by a cunning wench, who has long acted as a courtesan, but marries him as if she were an innocent and chaste virgin. In between these scenes, is the love affair of a Mr. Penitent Brothel with the young wife of an old jealous moralist; it stands in no sort of connection with the principal action, and is concluded by the sudden repentance of the lover. The devil (introduced under the name of Succubus) tries in vain to turn the penitent sinner from his better intentions, but the latter resists the temptation and even leads the wife back to the path of virtue. This interference of the devil, and the admixture

Middleton, now first collected, etc., by the Rev. A. Dyce. London, 1840, vol. i. pp. ix, xiii., xvi., xxxviii.

* Dyce, l.c., i. 121 ff.

† Further particulars in regard to this in Book IV.

‡ Dyce, l.c., ii. 326 ff.

of a serious moral in the play—which otherwise appears but a copy of the frivolous customs of the fashionable London world of 1608—and the introduction of a bevy of witches in one of his later dramas,* proves that Middleton, so to say, fluctuated between the Middle Ages and more recent times, without being able to fill up the gap between them, because he did not comprehend either the old nor the new spirit of the age. Subsequently, however, if not in form, at all events in regard to subject, he went completely over to the newer School in its ideas of art and life. ‘Women Beware of Women’ † is a play full of immorality and adultery, murders and slaughter, the reflection of common reality in a completely demoralised age. The tragic muse is here no longer the earnest, exalted goddess absorbed in deep thought and moved by inward sympathy, but the Fury of crime who visits the demoralised world in order to destroy it, and herself with it. The moral forces are indeed partly represented by the Lord Cardinal, but they only externally affect the dramatic characters, without actually influencing their actions, and scarcely find time enough to express a few religious commonplaces about eternal punishment in hell and such things. We cannot sympathise with any of the persons represented, because they are mere fools and wretches, who rush past so rapidly and in so unmotivated a manner, from crime to crime, or, like Brancha, fall so rapidly from the height of pure and noble womanhood into the lowest immorality, that they do not seem like real human beings, but empty, hideous masks.

The composition corresponds with the subject, and is evidently incapable of controlling the multitude of events and actions, hence is somewhat restless and irregular and appears defective, forced and obscure. The catastrophe especially, is so unintelligible, that one cannot say with certainty how the six-fold murder, with which the piece closes, is brought about. And yet the piece is one of Middleton’s best works and, as Hazlitt says, is distinguished by ‘a rich marrowy vein of internal sentiment, and cool cutting irony of expression;’—still the language suffers

* A tragi-comedy called *The Witch*, in Dyce. iii. 247 ff.

† Reprinted in Dyce, iv. 514 ff.

from a certain dryness and poverty, and hence may perhaps be adequate for describing what takes place externally, but not for delineating the violent emotions, affections and passions which arise in the piece. Middleton's later comedies—and comedy was the principal field of his ac-
tern School;
 and the low

ideas of life presented to him by the spirit of his age. The best of these are again his earlier ones. 'A Trick to Catch the Old One,' and 'Michaelmas Term.'* 'A Game of Chess,'† an allegory—in which the white and black figures (King, Queen, Knights, Bishops, etc.) are the characters represented, and in which Ignatius Loyola and 'Error' appear in the Induction—is a sharp satire upon the King of Spain, the Duke of Gondomar, the Bishop of Spalato, etc., in their relation to the English court. The piece brought punishment upon its author and the King's Players (who acted the piece on the stage),‡ and also furnishes a proof that Middleton, even in this direction, followed the tendencies of the newer School.

It is much the same with *William Rowley's* later works in comparison with his earlier ones, for while his comedy, 'A New Wonder, A Woman Never Vext' §—by the ingenious way and the fine irony with which it eulogises the virtue of feminine gentleness as a new wonder, and as a kind of talisman which, with magic power, changes the wildest rakes into excellent husbands, and conciliates the most embittered minds—still possesses something of the delicate, poetical colouring of the older school, his 'Match at Midnight,'|| is, I think, already more like a later comedy of the Ben Jonson tendency. For the latter is nothing but a dramatised genre-picture from common life, representing an old usurer courting a young rich widow, who, however, is deceived by her and his own jovial, dissolute son, with the help of a bawd, a courtesan and some other like-minded individuals. The point is, that in the end, the son also finds himself made a fool of by the supposed widow and her disguised husband.

* Dyce, i. 414 f. ii. 1 ff.

† Dyce, i. p. xxviii. f.

|| Ibid., vii. 299.

† Dyce, iv. 302 ff.

§ Dodsley, *l.c.*, v. 235 ff.

Lastly, 'The Changeling,'* a tragedy which W. Rowley wrote in conjunction with Middleton, shows pretty much the same conception of tragedy as we became acquainted with in Middleton's 'Women beware of Women.' The language, the delineation of character, and composition are also essentially the same. In the last respect it has the additional defect, that the love affair between Antonio, Francisco, and the wife of Doctor Alibius, stands not only in no connection whatever with the main action, but is likewise founded upon an intrigue which, when scarcely begun, comes to a standstill in the middle, and hovers vaguely in mid-air without any conclusion.

A similar position, that is, the same unfortunate indecision—partly leaning to the Shakspearian, partly to the Ben Jonson School—is met with in *John Marston* and *John Webster*, whose first poetical activity coincides with the commencement of the struggle between the two opposite tendencies. Both very likely appeared as dramatic authors much about the same time as Middleton and Rowley, hence, in the last years of the sixteenth century; according to Henslowe's 'Diary' (p. 156) the former made his first appearance in 1599, the latter in 1598.† In talent they, it is true, surpass their two above-mentioned contemporaries, but for this very reason the indecision, in which they resemble them, appears all the more decided. We must, however, not allow ourselves to be led astray by the circumstance, that Marston was originally at personal enmity with Ben Jonson (as is proved with certainty from Jonson's 'Poetaster'), and that even after a temporary reconciliation—during which, in 1604, he dedicated his 'Malcontent' to him, and wrote some lines in praise of Jonson's 'Sejanus'—he, in 1606, again pole-

* *Old Plays, being a Continuation, etc.*, iv. 225, Dyce, *l.c.*, iv. 204 ff.

† At least, I do not consider the play entitled *The Guise*—which Henslowe (p. 110) mentions under the date of Nov. 27th, 1598—to be Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*, but Webster's lost play, which he enumerates among the latter's earlier works in the dedication to the *Devil's Law Case* (1623) under the title of *The Guise*. For as Henslowe, in other passages, gives Marlowe's piece its right name, and under November 3rd, 1601, again expressly mentions *The Guise* in connection with Webster, I cannot see why the remark in 1598 should not have likewise applied to Webster's *Guise*.

mises against him vigorously in the introduction to his 'Sophonisbe.' It is likewise a matter of no importance that Webster seems at first to have been influenced and to have received his poetical training more from Marlowe's than from Ben Jonson's genius. Nevertheless the spirit of Marston's and Webster's compositions, their view of life, their idea of dramatic art, their conception of tragedy, in short, all that affects the *subject*, appears so closely allied to the spirit of the Ben Jonson School, that from this point of view both have to be considered followers of the more recent tendency of art. On the other hand, the dramatic dress which they hang round this subject, in other words the *form* of their compositions, has certainly still a greater resemblance to the course pursued by the older School. In fact, Marston's object was, as he himself says, 'not to tye myself to relate anything as an historian, but to inlarge everything as a poet. To transcribe authors, quote authorities, and translate Latin prose orations into English blank verse.' He sympathises as little as Webster with Jonson's passion for the ancient drama and the Aristotelian rules. In Marston and Webster, the *form* of their composition, as well as language and characterisation, is more that free mode of representation, suggested by direct instinct of feeling and of imagination, than Jonson's style of writing, which is controlled by a reflecting understanding, is intentional and full of tendency. But if we examine Marston's 'Malcontent,' his 'Parasitaster, or the Fawn,' 'Antonio and Melida,' among others,* or look more closely into Webster's tragedy, 'The White Devil,' or his comedies, 'The Devil's Law Case,' 'A Cure for a Cuckold,' 'Westward Hoe,' 'Northward Hoe' (the second of which was written in conjunction with Rowley, the two last with Dekker †), we shall find that in spite of the decided superiority of Webster's talent, the character of his, as well as of Marston's pieces, almost invariably describes only common reality with its

* Dodsley, *l.c.*, iv. 17 ff., and in the *Old Plays*, etc., ii. 107 ff., 277 ff. Halliwell's *Collection of Marston's Works* (London, 1856) has unfortunately not been at my service.

† *The Works of J. Webster, now first collected, etc.*, by the Rev. A. Dyce, London, 1830.

vices and weaknesses, without any poetical elevation and idealisation; * accordingly, that they stand opposed to the freer form, and that the latter therefore only leads both poets astray, occasionally into what is wild, improbable, and unnatural—of which many examples † might be given as proofs in Webster, and in Marston are especially to be found in ‘Antonio and Mellida.’ Webster himself superfluously declares, in the Address to the reader in his ‘White Devil’: ‘I have ever truly cherished my good opinion of other men’s worthy labours, especially of that full and heightened style of Master Chapman; the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson: the no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher; and lastly (without wrong last to be named), the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakspeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood.’

As regards their comedies (for instance in Marston’s

* An exception to this is formed by Webster’s *Appius and Virginia*. It may very likely have been his best tragedy; but in this case, history had already done so much for him in the way of invention, that the only thing left for him to do was skilfully to clothe it in the dramatic garb. No special effort was here required as regards composition and delineation of characters; the main object was to let the given action and the given characters express themselves in an appropriate form according to the whole course of affairs, and in this respect Webster’s energy and the bold pathetic flight of his language—which is rich in maxims but inclines rather too much towards bombastic rhetoric—were of great advantage. *The Dutchess of Malfi*, also—which after *Appius and Virginia* is Webster’s best work (an excellent translation of this piece into German has been made by Bodenstedt, *Shakspeare’s Zeitgenossen u. ihre Werke*)—may be reckoned as one of the exceptions. Here, at least, the Duchess and Antonio, the chief characters of the play, are really noble natures, and the tragic element, as in *Appius and Virginia*, is more in the Shakspearian style.

† I need only remind the reader of the completely superfluous, and hence very unnatural, spectral apparitions in *The White Devil*, which but increase the riotous, chaotic doings of the piece. In regard to this tragedy, I cannot agree either with A. Dyce, in his praise bestowed upon it, or with Charles Lamb’s opinion, which is shared by Bodenstedt (*l.c.*, i. 5 f.). With the exception of some scenes which certainly manifest some power of characterisation and representation, it is written entirely in the spirit of the later tendency of dramatic art, which was approaching its decay.

'Malcontent'), we find in both poets the prevalence of a spirit of satire and of censoriousness which, with prosaic seriousness, finds fault with everything, from religious considerations down to the smallest tom-fooleries about fashions and dress; Marston's comic figures also often imperceptibly become mere caricatures, and their intention of being satirical is, so to speak, written on their faces. The tragic element generally consists only in the evil which destroys itself; the composition is a series of intrigues usually founded upon foul deeds, partly well connected externally, but without internal substance; the characterisation is, indeed, generally correct, clear and precise, but the delineation is too sharp and angular, the colours are laid on too thickly, the separate figures depicted more like portraits without any ideal beauty; the language, lastly, is that sharp sententious diction, coined by reason, which moves on more in acute angles, than in the undulating line of beauty. Even the small peculiarities of Ben Jonson and his School are again met with in both of these poets. Both, for instance, are fonder of discoursing in those pompous words and phrases of the English language derived from the Latin, than of employing the more modest Anglo-Saxon; both are fond of putting Latin sentences into the mouths of their characters, in other words, they are fond of showing off their higher culture and erudition; nay, Marston, in 'Antonio and Mellida,' commits the absurdity of causing the two lovers—at the moment of their greatest ecstasy, where they have unexpectedly met each other again—suddenly to express their joy in Italian sonnets.

I think I may be allowed to pass on without entering upon a deeper and more detailed criticism of Webster's and Marston's dramas; for from the preceding explanation, the reader must have found a sufficient confirmation of what I maintained above, viz., that about the years 1605–1608 a decided change must have taken place both in the taste of the public, as well as in the ideas of art and life, entertained by the leading poets of the day. Chapman, as we have seen, complained about this time that satire and ridicule were the only acceptable subjects—a complaint which evidently referred chiefly to comedy—and

Heywood, in the Prologue to his 'Challenge for Beauty,'* observes that

'Our nation,
Already too much taxt for imitation
In seeking to ape others, cannot quit
Some of our poets who have sinned in it,
For where before great patriots, dukes and kings,
Presented for some high facinorous things,
Were the stage subject; now we strive to flie
In their low pitch who never could soare hie:
For now the common argument intreats
Of puling lovers, craftie bawds and cheates.'

This observation, which was obviously meant to apply chiefly to tragedy, and which, although it may have directly referred to a somewhat later period, still no doubt has some application when referred to the years after 1606—although perhaps of a somewhat more limited kind. Ben Jonson himself, in the Prologue to his 'Volpone' of the 11th of February, 1607, expresses his indignation that the only thing now to be heard was bawdry, profanation and blasphemies, and the whole looseness of a language offensive alike to God and man.

Of what the changes consisted, I have already repeatedly intimated; for in describing more accurately the chief representatives of the earlier School, and then the points of transition from it to Ben Jonson, in poets such as Chapman, Middleton, Rowley, Webster and Marston, I have already pointed out the principal differences between the two Schools. But the contrast between them can be fully illustrated only by a detailed characterisation of Ben Jonson himself, and the chief representatives of his tendency.

* *O. P. being a Contin.*, vi. 333

CHAPTER III.

BEN JONSON AND HIS SCHOOL.

His Life and Character. Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Ford and Field.

BEN JONSON was born in Westminster, London, in 1573,* and was the son of a Scottish gentleman. His father, however, died shortly before his birth, and his mother—left in needy circumstances—soon afterwards married again; this time a citizen of London, a bricklayer by trade. But the worldly circumstances of his step-father also were not brilliant. Ben Jonson attended the Grammar-school of Westminster at the expense of a friend of his father's, Camden by name, and, as has hitherto been assumed, he also studied at the university of Cambridge, at least for a short time. This last statement, however, is a mere conjecture; Drummond, to whom Jonson himself related the history of his life, knows nothing about this. But certain it is that, for a time, he was a bricklayer. However, he could not endure this low mechanical occupation and, accordingly, upon the outbreak of the war in the Netherlands, he became a soldier. This career also does not appear to have brought him any good luck, or to have given him any satisfaction. At all events, when the war was over, he returned home to devote himself to his studies. His learning—which was, in fact, excellent for those days, and which was subsequently recognised by both universities in his receiving the honorary degree of M.A.—was, accordingly, acquired by his own efforts, by persevering, private study, which accompanied the work of his trade; this is a proof not only of his eminent abilities, but also of energetic perseverance and strength of will. According to the general supposition (which, however, is devoid of

* Not in 1574, as was formerly generally supposed. See *Notes of B. Jonson's Conversation with W. Drummond*. Lond., Pr. f. t. Sh. Soc. 1842, p. 39.

certain foundation), he directed his attention to the stage as early as 1598, and was probably, in the first instance, an actor in the 'Curtain.' His earliest extant piece is the already mentioned, 'Every Man in his Humour,' which, as he himself says, was first performed in 1598, in the 'Globe.' It is possible, nay probable, that he wrote for the stage even at an earlier date, at least he told Drummond in 1619 that the half of his comedies had not been printed.* Very probably, these were for the most part youthful productions, of which he was subsequently ashamed; however, as these works are lost, and as he himself disowns them by not incorporating them in the complete edition of his works, which he himself arranged, the starting point of his dramatic career, for us, is the year 1598.† From that time till his death on the 6th of August 1637, he wrote eighteen dramas, several so-called 'Court Entertainments' (allegories, mixed with monologues and dialogues), a great number of Masques, —small dramas, interspersed with songs, somewhat resembling the modern vaudevilles, which Jonson may be said to have introduced (these are likewise allegorical subjects)—a quantity of epigrams, and smaller poems of every description. In 1616, his learned patron James I. appointed him poet laureate, gave him an annual income of one hundred marks, called upon him to satisfy all the poetical wants of the Court, and in 1625, gave him—in a letter patent—his royal word, that he would nominate him Master of the Revels, after the deaths of Sir George Buc and Sir John Astley. But James died before the place became vacant by the death of these two gentlemen,

* *B. Jonson's Conversation, &c.*, p. 27.

† Gifford, and after him Barry Cornwall, in their already-mentioned editions of Ben Jonson's works, assume that his comedy, *The Case is Altered* (first printed in 1609), is the oldest of his extant pieces, and that it was written as early as 1596. But Gifford himself—*B. Jonson's Works*, vi. 327—points out that it cannot have been composed till after the year 1598, as Ben Jonson there makes some critical and satirical side-thrusts at Anthony Munday, because of his having been called 'the best plotter' by Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, which appeared in 1598. With this argument Gifford defeats himself. Collier, *Life of Shakespeare*, l.c., p. clxvi. f., as clearly proves that *Every Man in his Humour* was not—as Gifford says—performed as early as 1597, but that it was first played in 1598.

and Jonson did not receive his appointment. The years between 1612 and 1625, that of James's death, seem to have been the most brilliant period of Ben Jonson's life. Charles I., it is true, increased his salary from one hundred marks to one hundred pounds; and he also received from the City an annuity of one hundred nobles, but the authority he exercised, in James's time, at Court and among the educated classes, appears to have wavered since then, and to have gradually decreased.

Ben Jonson, as already said, was a man of sound learning; he possessed great shrewdness and an abundance of pertinent, though somewhat heavy wit, but no delicacy of feeling, no depth of sentiment, and still less creative fancy, and accordingly, no flight of the imagination. He was born to be a critic rather than a poet, and may, to some extent, be called the Lessing of his day, except that he fought for an erroneous, one-sided tendency in art, not for nature and originality, but for artificiality and servile imitation.* The most practical sense controlled his mental activity; by means of it he formed theories, speculated and criticised, examined and considered; and attacked everything that resisted his examination, or injured him personally and opposed his endeavours, with a courage as great as his sarcasm was cutting. If we look aside from the attacks upon his personal character, the reproaches of inventive insolence, arrogance, self-praise, flattery, etc.—about the truth or falsehood of which it is not our part to judge—the dispute between him and Dekker, as we have it in Jonson's 'Poetaster,' and Dekker's 'Satiromastix or the Untrussing of the Humorous Poet,'† turns more upon the nature and rights of *Satire*. Ben Jonson admits that he is satirical, but maintains that satire has at all times belonged to the nature of comedy; Dekker, on the other hand,

* Of the originality of his mind and character, which Mézières (*Prédécesseurs et Contemporains de Sh.*, p. 194) praises in him, I have been able to discover little or nothing in his writings. But Mézières even contradicts himself when, on p. 201, he makes the perfectly correct remark that, "*Son esprit semble obsédé par le souvenir de ses lectures; son érudition lui présente sans cesse des images, des expressions et des idées empruntées à l'antiquité.*"

† In Hawkins, iii. 95 ff.

declares that Jonson's principal error was the inconsiderate and malicious satire which he directed against both friends and foes, whereby, so to say, he had violated the dramatic Muse and robbed her of her innocence and chastity. When Dekker, in addition, reproaches him with working heavily, and of producing fragments—inasmuch as he picked ancient writers to pieces, and occasionally decorated his dramas with foreign feathers ('with jests from the Temple's Revels')—these reproaches are but more or less important secondary features.

Another characteristic feature in Jonson's style is touched upon by Marston, when, as already said, he maintains that Jonson refers to things only as an historian, and does not understand how to explain, extend and enlarge them poetically.⁷ In fact, Ben Jonson was the first to introduce satire—in the narrower sense of the word—into comedy. Earlier English dramatists, it is true, had also expended their wit on individual occurrences, on absurdities in fashions, customs, and usages of the time, but only in that laughing, harmless, incidental manner, which never offends, because it regards the special only as the result or example of what is general, in fact, as the folly and perversity in human nature in general, and therefore, applying to the satirist himself as well. Ben Jonson, on the other hand, depicted customs and characters with life-like truth, gave sarcasm abusive language, and thus furnished the comic element with its offensive sting; he ridicules, not only incidentally and unwittingly, but intentionally and fully; he not only wished to excite laughter, but to correct and instruct, not only to jest, but at the same time express his opinion and contempt; thus the comic writer became the satirist.

Satire and the description of customs, however, is Jonson's strong point, and in this he seems occasionally to have become personal, but—with the exception of his quarrel with Dekker and Marston—we can now scarcely judge of this, as we possess next to nothing of the personal relations of the time; in general, however, his satirical sallies are of a more objective nature. Where he combats folly, vice and senselessness, he forgets his learning, he warms up, his anger gives his concise, sententious language a certain heavy grandeur, everything, diction and charac-

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terisation, drawing and colouring, light and shade are not only correct and appropriate, but full of life and energy; in short, he is there in his element. For his element is, in fact, common reality, life and men just as they are, that is, life and history in the form in which the ordinary historian is wont to conceive them, as opposed to the poet. His comedies, especially, are such faithful pictures of the time, nay of the year in which they were written, that we can, from them, form a good idea of the prevailing customs, fashions, and usages in the different spheres of London life.*

Jouson is a decided realist; reality in its entire nakedness, and represented from its tangible side with historical fidelity, is to him truth as well. Of a different, higher, poetical truth, a truth in the form of beauty, he is unconscious, or, what is the same thing, when he wishes to represent it (as in his Masques), it becomes in his hands an abstract allegory. He cannot connect either ideal or human generalities into an organic whole with the real and the individual—of the former he has no poetical conception, with him it imperceptibly vanishes into a lifeless, philosophical idea. But on the other hand, for the individual, for any special given phenomenon, he has a sharp eye, and with his fine talent for observation, he well knows how to penetrate into its most secret corners and most hidden folds; it is here that he finds the richest materials for his critical understanding and his acute judgment. Hence it is from this sphere that he draws his characters and describes them in sharp outlines with a firm hand. But he is, as he himself says, more especially ‘the humorous poet;’ every one of his characters, therefore, invariably exhibits but one definite and unchangeable species of humour, *i.e.*, each appears only as the representative of a definite species of man, or even only of a number of individuals, in whom this or that special tendency, this or that peculiarity, habit, custom—be it good or bad, foolish or wise—predominates one-sidedly, perhaps in a mistaken striving after novelty and originality; he describes only special, rare and strange characters, with quite unusual peculiarities, for whom he invents equally unusual and in

* As Mézières, *l.c.*, 203 ff., has done in a highly delightful manner.

most cases improbable situations. In short, he invariably exhibits his figures to the public, only from one conspicuous point of view, that is, he describes them not as full, complete and independent persons, but principally as the bearers of *his* poetical tendencies. For this reason his characters generally leave us cold and unsympathetic. He is ever full of intentions, whether it be to combat folly and vice, coarseness and vulgarity, or to instruct his age about the true nature of art, to impart taste and judgment, or to diffuse learning and culture, etc.; he is more particularly ever full of intention to gain a position for himself and his efforts. He is never able to forget himself; wherever we may look, we invariably have, indirectly or directly before our eyes, Ben Jonson and his convictions, his age and his surroundings. In a word, he was the representative of modern times, of that mental tendency which led over from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century; he was, so to say, that half of Shakspeare which reached into the future—but in a striking manner.

His main strength lay in his grand one-sidedness, his talent for opposition, so to say, his chemical power of dissolving and analysing. He analysed everything, so as to examine it more thoroughly; he wished above all to have safe and tangible reasons for everything; he wished in all cases to know what had to be done and what was to be left undone; the clearness of reflecting self-consciousness was all he aimed at. But of the purely artistic, half-conscious, half-instinctive, yet always directly creative activity of mind, he scarcely possessed as much as the first elements, and followed it only against his will. This was the reason why that second side of Shakspeare's poetical character—which, like the whole English popular theatre down to his time, was still turned towards the Middle Ages—was so unintelligible, and seemed erroneous to him. This opposition is either loudly or gently expressed throughout all his works, he pours forth the sharpest invective of his wit against all the remains of the spirit of the Middle Ages, but not only against the belief in devils, demons and ghosts, not only against witchcraft and sorcery, alchemy, and all supernatural science, but chivalry also, and its modern remains (the English knights, of whom King James created

a great number), fanciful love, with its obstinacy and its sensitiveness—in short, everything that in the slightest degree bordered upon enthusiasm, he pursued with scorn and derision. But it was the eccentric religious views and the moral severity of the Puritans, that was more particularly hateful to him; he considered these *pure* hypocrisy and falsehood, and it was these which he attacked with his most cutting weapons. To his realistic understanding, all that which lay beyond the horizon of tangible reality and of practical interest, was to him pure nonsense. Thus, with the sword of his criticism and reflection, he destroyed the old poetical world, without being able to build up a new one in its place—a world which should not merely be worldly, but poetical as well.

A mind like Ben Jonson's must indeed have found more pleasure in the measured and regular style of the antique drama, the clear, plastic course of the action, the transparent, extremely simple composition, the contemplation of natural conditions of time and space, than in Shakspeare's gay series of complicated and apparently irregular poems. In judging of their beauty his eye did not look beyond the *special*; he wanted imagination and depth of thought to comprehend the whole as a whole, and to recognise the ingenious harmony, the intrinsic unity in the apparently superfluous variety, and the order and objectivity in the apparently irregular arbitrariness. This was the reason of his maintaining, in reply to Drummond, that 'Shakspeare wanted art.' At the same time, from the theoretical point of view, he felt the necessity of introducing law and rule into dramatic poetry. If Shakspeare did not satisfy him in this respect, the other poets of the earlier school would naturally satisfy him still less. Ben Jonson, accordingly, turned aside from the prevailing style of dramatic art in the English popular theatre, and looked to the antique drama for his models and examples. However, it was not so much the tragedy of Æschylus or Sophocles, with its plastic simplicity and clearness, its lofty religious and moral earnestness, the epico-idealistic dignity of its characters, and the lyrical pathos of its language, nor the comedy of Aristophanes, with its bold diction and the grotesque monsters of a

fantastic power of invention, that attracted him. Of all these peculiarities of the Greek drama, we find little or nothing in his poems. It was rather the Latin authors, Plautus, Terence, and Seneca, whom he more especially followed, and with which his pieces, at least, have most resemblance. But he even surpasses his models in the accuracy and minuteness of his descriptions of customs, in the thoroughness of his reflection, in his satirical sharpness, whereas he is inferior to them in harmless humour, readiness of joke, finish of composition, and in the grace and elasticity of the representation. In fact he did not so much over-estimate the Latin drama on account of its *poetical* beauty, as rather because—more especially in comedy—all there seemed to be so natural, and so in accordance with reality, to be founded on definite reasons and fixed rules, and because, he thought that, with the help of Aristotle, he would be able to demonstrate why this was right and good.

Thus, in one of his earliest and one of his best pieces, 'Every Man in his Humour,' we indeed, at once, find the so-called unity of time correctly observed; the whole action is spun out in the course of one day; the unity of place also is partially adhered to, at least the separate scenes, although played in different localities, never leave London. But as regards the unity of action, Ben Jonson takes as many, and even greater liberties than Plautus and Terence. The most various kinds of intrigues run through and into one another: first old Knowell, who wants to turn his son from his idle, thriftless life, then Kitely and his wife, who mutually torment each other with jealousy, then the love intrigues between young Knowell with Miss Bridget, etc.—all of these threads are, it is true, connected externally, and are, so to say, woven one into the other by a sly, intriguing servant, who is the soul of the piece, but of *internal* unity, the concord of several tones on a single fundamental note, there is no trace whatever. The petty jealousies of Kitely have as little internal community with the well-founded anxieties of old Knowell, as with the love affair of Bridget and young Knowell. The whole piece, as the prologue itself says,

'shews an image of the times
And sports with human follies, not with crimes,'

i.e., it is a pretty faithful description of the customs and the mode of life in certain spheres of London society as it then was, but conceived from its perverse and ridiculous side. Every one of the characters from Clement, 'the old merry magistrate,' down to Cob, the water-carrier, and his wife, show themselves only within their peculiar 'humour' (hence the name of the piece), that is, everyone represents only a certain feature in the picture, a single species of folly or ridiculousness. Hence the three fools of the piece: Captain Bobadill, a cowardly braggard, Master Stephen, a 'country gull,' and Master Matthew, a 'town gull,' play the principal parts, although they take no active share whatever in the action. For this reason, however, the *dramatis personæ* excite our sympathy as little as the action itself; although correctly drawn and successful portraits, they are too one-sided and cut too much after one pattern; the action, on the other hand, is partly too arbitrary and improbable in its plot (Brainmore's disguising himself as an old soldier, the principal cause of the complication, seems to be completely unmotivated), and partly devoid of all poetical and higher character. At least, such mere bantering as Brainmore (with Bredwell's assistance) carries on with the follies of the other persons, is in itself alone neither poetical nor ingenious.

The satirical element in this comedy, as well as in its pendant, 'Every Man out of his Humour,' is introduced but in a very faint and concealed manner. In his next work, however, which we have already discussed, 'Cynthia's Revels, or the Fountain of Self-Love' (1600)—where, under the disguise of ancient names, but with constant hits at the present, he describes Court customs and Court life, and, as even the dedication intimates, it is his intention to show that the Court, in being the principal source of the morals of the people, should improve them, instead of encouraging selfishness and 'vanity'—his satire is already laid on in much stronger colours; at least, the courtiers felt themselves aggrieved, and Marston and Dekker thought themselves personally insulted by it. 'The Poetaster, or his Arraignment,' as already remarked, is throughout an invective and satire against Marston and Dekker, with an admixture of sallies against the earlier

poets of the popular theatre in general, and against actors and the theatre of the time, otherwise it is a mere succession of scenes, in reality without action and without connection. The scenes between Ovid and his father, the love affair of the former and the fair Julia, their meeting in Chloe's house, etc., seem to be mere loose appendages which flutter away into space, unfinished and incomplete, so that, in my opinion, Dekker's 'Satiromastix,' although by no means excellent, is nevertheless preferable in this respect.

'Eastward Hoe,' a comedy which Jonson wrote in conjunction with Chapman and Marston (printed in 1605, probably, however, with the omission or alteration of all offensive passages), contained such bitter attacks against the Scotch, perhaps also against the King himself or individual statesmen, that James I. caused the authors to be thrown into prison, and they narrowly escaped by sentence and law, losing their ears and noses. This danger seems to have made a lasting impression upon Ben Jonson, for in his later comedies, satire is again less prominent, or at least of a more general and indefinite character. Of these, his 'Volpone' and 'The Alchymist' are distinguished above the others, and together with 'Every Man in his Humour' may be considered Jonson's best works. 'Volpone, or the Fox,' which appeared upon the stage in 1605, is also interesting, owing to the fact that Ben Jonson, in the Dedication and Prologue, expresses his æsthetic principles more fully, and hence intention and development can be estimated one by the other. He here not only declares himself, as already said, opposed to the mischief of introducing all possible kinds of coarseness and wickedness upon the stage, but also maintains he has 'ever trembled to think toward the least profaneness, has loathed the use of such foul and unwashed bawdry, as is now made the food of the scene.' Yet 'Volpone' itself moves throughout among the lowest vices and crimes. A rich noble, who by falsehoods and deceit fills his coffers with presents extorted from his legacy-hunters, and satisfies his low desires; a villainous parasite who aids him in all kinds of ways, and in the end deceives him himself; a husband who sells his own wife to infamy; attempted rape and open perjury, are surely things not so very

different from 'ribaldry' and 'bawdry.' Of what avail is it that, in the end, the so-called poetical justice is satisfied. The stern and severe punishment inflicted upon the criminals only reconciles the moral feeling by annulling the object of comedy and every æsthetic effect. For as, throughout the play, we have before us nothing but vice and vulgarity and a couple of uninteresting fools (Celia and Bonario are too much merely secondary figures to excite sympathy), the serious conclusion makes the subject dwindle down into the common prosaic moral: Beware of carrying your viciousness as far as deceit, rape, and perjury!

Ben Jonson is no better in keeping his promise as regards the artistic form of the drama. In his prologue he boasts of presenting an improved and refined comedy, according to the demands of the best critics, and to have accurately observed 'the laws of time, place, and persons.' But even if we are willing to admit that the mass of events could be compressed into one day—which, however, would have its great difficulties—still the laws of locality are observed only in so far as the scene, although changing from one place to another, always remains within the city of Venice. And instead of the chief æsthetic requirement, unity of action, Ben Jonson has cunningly substituted the 'law of persons.' What he means by the latter expression cannot be said with certainty, probably the unity and immutability of the character given to each person. This, certainly, is as distinctly expressed as strictly observed, in other words, every figure again plays in rigid consistency only with its own definite and individual 'humour.' However, it is self-evident that as regards composition and the artistic unity of form, little or nothing is thereby gained. In this respect the piece is about as defective as 'Every Man in his Humour' and his other already-mentioned comedies. For even if all the various intrigues—which turn upon the person of Volpone, and are again centred in the character of a servant, the parasite Mosca—were allowed to be one action (although they are so only externally), still the scenes between Sir Politick Would-be and Peregrine are neither externally nor internally connected with the main action: these two

persons, and Nano, Castrone, and Androgyno, are as uninteresting as they are superfluous.

The external unity of locality, time and action seems to be most strictly adhered to in the 'Alchymist' (1610). Here also it is indeed scarcely credible that the space of a single day should be sufficient to include the mass of events, and yet it is, no doubt, at least conceivable. The place changes merely between the different rooms of one and the same house, it is only in the last act that one scene is enacted in the street before the house. Nay, even the unity of action is preserved, in so far as it consists only of a succession of impositions and knavish tricks, by which a number of fools and blockheads, each in his own way, are cheated out of their money and possessions. However, when more carefully examined, this mere succession is divided into a number of separate actions and intrigues which, being without a centre, without internal unity, are held together merely by the prosaic idea of deceit. The whole is again a picture from real life, exhibiting a characteristic feature of the time: the superstition and the credulity with which persons of all ranks continued to allow themselves to be made fools of by wonder-working imposters of all kinds; it is thus an attack upon the remains of the mediæval belief in ghosts, fairies, alchemy and magic arts. Otherwise the play moves in the same sphere as 'Volpone': the alchymist is a cunning vagrant, he together with Jeromy (Face), the butler, and Dol Common, a courtesan, play the chief parts. All the other characters, with the exception of Pertinax Surly and Lovewitt (who again are but secondary figures), exhibit such a vulgar disposition, or a foolishness so devoid of mind and heart, and again are so one-sided—each being characterised only by his or her special 'humour'—that they glide past our interest like mere masks. Even the Puritans (Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome), whom Ben Jonson introduces among the deceived children of the world by way of contrast, are ordinary hypocrites and blockheads, although he had a good opportunity for giving his play a higher psychological interest by pointing out how closely fanatical faith and common superstition border upon one another. The con-

clusion also, is in the highest degree unsatisfactory and unpoetical. In contrast to 'Volpone,' the principal agent of falsehood and deception—and thus of the whole action—is the butler Jeremy, who in this case is pardoned and his two accomplices helped to escape; nay, Lovewitt, his master, even approves of his rascally tricks, and in the end draws every advantage from them. This is a new piece of vulgarity which cannot be excused by pretended love of drollery and wit; for low imposition, bawdry and rape are, in themselves, neither witty nor droll, and the goddess of beauty and art can forgive all, but not vulgar ugliness or ugly vulgarity.

Nevertheless 'Volpone' and 'The Alchymist' are favourably distinguished by interesting complication and an unexpected solution of the plot, by animation and the rapid movement of the action, as well as by clever dialogue. In his other comedies—although as regards delineation of character, composition and poetical substance they stand no higher—Jonson often becomes heartily tedious, and wearies the most patient mind with the long pedantic speeches he puts into the mouths of his characters, with the lagging course of the action and the number of superfluous and uninteresting secondary figures, who serve only to retard the progress of the action. ✓

Although, as already said, the satire in all of these pieces is, so to say, concealed behind the general significance of the subject, still the conception of the comic, upon which they are founded, agrees with the nature of satire; we find in all cases the vices, follies and perversities of the age, not merely represented in the form of the laughable, and in the direct contradiction by which they annul themselves, but, as it were, drawn before justice and derided, condemned and pilloried for the improvement of others. Still it certainly is wit which instructs the law-suit, and rules the proceedings of the magistrate and the beadle, and moreover the sentence is generally just; but mere wit is in itself as little poetical as moral justice or a sentence of punishment and its execution. The fault is that the comic element does not lie in the object itself and in its representation, but in the manner in which it is treated by others, in the jokes

made at its expense, and in the contempt and derision which is poured over it. Ben Jonson produces his comic effect by the wit of a reflecting intellect which has its object before it externally, and quizzes it, not by the wit of a creative imagination which makes the object itself witty and appear comic. The prosaic seriousness of the critic, accordingly, breaks out everywhere and always destroys the poetical illusion which is called forth by the cleverly managed dramatic form. We leave the drama in a thoroughly prosaic mood of contempt or of indifference towards the degraded world, and with the equally prosaic consolation that we ourselves, after all, are somewhat better, and that vice and folly still invariably meet with their own punishment.

As regards Ben Jonson's conception of tragedy, the very subjects which he selected for his two tragedies are in the highest degree characteristic. The one treats of the fall of Sejanus, the other of the conspiracy of Catiline. 'Sejanus, his Fall' (1603), is justly considered the better of the two; for he gives an excellent account of the story of the notorious favourite of Tiberius, of the tyrant himself, and of the cunning manner in which the latter made a slave of fallen Rome. But it is merely dramatised history, or rather history in dialogue, an exact account of what is given in the authorities from which it is drawn, with genuine quotations below the text, and faithful translations of passages from Tacitus, Plutarch and Suetonius in the text. But mere history is not poetical; it does, indeed, in all cases contain poetical matter, but its treasures cannot be pocketed without some trouble, and just as the earth conceals within her dark lap the precious gold in its yet rough, impure and formless state, so the poet has first to bring forth his treasures, to melt them and to pour them into the form of poetry. Or is it to be considered poetical in Ben Jonson when, in dry succession, he introduces all the horrors of the tyranny of a Tiberius, and all the foul deeds of a Sejanus? Is it a poetical sight to see the exalted, but passive and impotent virtues of a Silius, Sabinus, and Cremutius Cordus fall under the executioner's axe like lambs? Can it poetically elevate our feelings, or even merely excite our sympathy,

that in the end the wretched favourite and the still more wretched tyrant are, as it were, tripped up by the heels, and that the hideous Colossus, bloated by vice and crime, should be brought to ruin? On the contrary, such a subject, such a conception of history must necessarily destroy all artistic motives, all fineness of characterisation, all force of diction.

We do not undervalue Ben Jonson's good intention; he wished, on the one hand to oppose the inadmissible liberties and arbitrary disfigurements, with which most of the poets of the day treated historical subjects; on the other hand, he wished to contrast an intelligible, systematic and well-arranged drama, as regards form, with the extravagant and irregular productions of an unbridled imagination, such as still monopolised the stage. But his prosaic idea of the nature of dramatic poetry, his equally prosaic conceptions of tragedy and his mistaken zeal for the antique form of the drama, misguided him in the choice and in the treatment of his subjects. As he thought the drama ought to be a faithful picture of real life, he not only believed that there should not, in any feature, be a deviation from history, but also that no feature should be added, and not only that no alteration should be made in the subject, but that the form should remain unchanged. And as with him, the tragic element was but the dramatic embodiment of the chastising Nemesis, or of blind fate sending death and destruction, he considered the representation of great historical crimes and their punishment to be the best tragic subjects.

As regards form, lastly, he here disregards the Aristotelian rules even more than in most of his comedies, in so far as the unity of time is not attended to, and the unity of place and action is no more strictly observed than in his comedies. He expressly excuses himself for this in the preface to his 'Sejanus,' owing to the stubbornness of the subject, and the necessary regard for his public, which, he says, kept him from furnishing his piece with choruses after the manner of the ancients. However, there was no need of any such excuse, for the dramatic form is essentially as good, or as bad, as in all of his other pieces. The rational, systematic order, of

which he delights to boast, consists, in fact, merely in the chronological arrangement of the more important facts concerning the person of Sejanus, thus in the direct connection of all individual parts of the action, with the character and the fortunes of his hero. The latter forms the centre upon which everything turns, all other relations, all the other characters are developed only in so far as they affect Sejanus's sphere of life, in other words, all the other persons, Tiberius not excepted, are devoid of all independent significance, are purely secondary figures, who appear on the stage and again vanish without leaving a trace of their existence, according as Sejanus's constellation affects or has passed by them. And as of these more or less secondary persons there are no fewer than thirty-three, it may easily be imagined that many of the scenes of the play are wanting in lively interest, especially as Sejanus himself is incapable of winning any great sympathy, and Ben Jonson's mode of delineating characters always shows us but some special side, no full, complete men. At all events this unity of form is not organic, or *dramatic*, is no unity of *action*, but biographical, mechanical and prosaic; the centre, as such, illuminated on one side by the darkening of all the radii together with the periphery, is indeed a unity, but simply a dry, mathematical unity.

In 'Catiline, his Conspiracy' (1611), Ben Jonson, it is true, treats the historical subject somewhat more freely, and the first two acts consequently possess somewhat more dramatic life; moreover, the rest of the characters—at least the principal persons—are somewhat more independently contrasted with the hero, they have their own sphere of life, and hence claim our interest in a higher degree. But to make up for this, from the beginning of the third act, the action lags on in long speeches (partly translations from Sallust, Cicero, etc.), without moving from the spot; and as these, in themselves, have no ideal connection, the unity of place and time is no better observed than in 'Sejanus;' in the last act the scene changes several times between Rome and Fiesole, and as even the above-mentioned mathematical unity is wanting, the piece is *devoid* of any formal unity, if it is not found in the one

fact, that the unsuccessful conspiracy of Catiline forms the substance of the whole representation. Otherwise the choice of the subject, the conception of the tragic, composition, delineation of character and language are essentially the same as in 'Sejanus.' However, we are willing to admit that both tragedies are especially distinguished by that 'gravity and height of elocution, fulness and frequency of sentence,' of which Ben Jonson boasts: it also cannot be denied that there is a 'dignity of persons,' but only in the sense in which Ben Jonson uses the words. Yet 'Catiline' is specially interesting, only, because Ben Jonson has here actually made the attempt of re-introducing the chorus of ancient tragedy, which seems to have disappeared from the English stage since those first attempts of the antique tendency in the domain of tragedy. Every act, with the exception of the fifth, closes with a speech from the 'chorus,' in rhymed strophes of a lyrical character, with general observations, opinions and wishes. Nothing, however, shows more plainly than these inappropriate choral chants, which are mere external appendages and disturb the whole illusion, how little Jonson comprehended ancient tragedy, and how far the latter, in its inmost spirit and nature, is removed from his tragedies.*

* Mézières (*l.c.*), as a Frenchman, and in the interest and out of sympathy with the so-called classic French drama, regards Ben Jonson and his style from the most favourable point of view; but in all essential points he nevertheless so fully agrees with the characterisation and judgment I gave—not only of Ben Jonson, but of all the other predecessors and contemporaries of Shakspeare—in the *second* edition of this work, and which I have here repeated with but some improvements of expression, that my æsthetico-critical principles have only been confirmed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEN-JONSON SCHOOL—*continued.**Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Ford and Field.*

BEN JONSON'S opinion as to the nature of dramatic poetry, his conception of tragedy, his idea of comedy, his whole view of life with its rational realism, we again meet with in Beaumont, Fletcher, Massinger, Ford, Field, and all the younger dramatists from 1605 to 1642. I do not mean to say that these poets acknowledged Ben Jonson, the *poet*, as their lord and master, or that they exclusively took him as their model, imitated his style, or adopted his peculiarities (it is only Beaumont's 'Woman Hater' and 'The Nice Valour or the Passionate Madman' that are decided imitations of Ben Jonson). On the contrary, the most distinguished of them, Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger, in poetical talent, far surpassed Ben Jonson's more critical than poetical mind. And even though Beaumont, in his eminent acuteness of intellect, and his prevailing vindication of criticism and reflection, closely resembled his friend Ben Jonson, still Fletcher's poetical talent stood nearer Shakespeare than Ben Jonson, and Massinger stood at least as near the one as the other. My reason for having classed these dramatists under the collective name of the Ben-Jonson School is, on the one hand, because Ben Jonson was the first to introduce the new conception and mode of treating the drama, the first, intentionally to exclude the still remaining elements of the mediæval formation of art, and thus, the first to break the threads of the hitherto ever progressive development of the drama; the first to raise the fundamental features of the new view of art and life—called the 'Renaissance'—to constitutive elements of dramatic poetry; the first to make the drama the mere image of reality, in short, the first to introduce the

complete transformation of the drama, both as regards subject and form; on the other hand, because, in England, it was chiefly the above mentioned poets, who, by their great talent for the new view of art and life, first, if we may so speak, acquired the franchise in the domain of poetry.* For, in reality, what was wanting in Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger, was only the inner centre and the point of gravitation of all art, that fine and infallible sense of beauty which, in all cases, knows how to hit the right medium, to place all the individual qualities that constitute the poet, as well as all the elements of poetry itself, in harmony among one another, to balance them with one another, and to put them in the right relation with their common object. The several gifts—acuteness of judgment, readiness and fulness of wit, boldness of invention, animated delineation of character, susceptibility of feeling, pathos of emotion and of passion, purity and power of expression in all the tones of language, from Fletcher's elegance and fluency of conversation, through Beaumont's dialectic acuteness of reflection, up to Massinger's overpowering rhetoric of the tragic pathos—all these several gifts they possessed in a more or less high degree, so that in one or other respect, they can be placed by the side of Shakspeare. But these talents were, so to speak, scattered, that is, had no solidity or connection, and those who possessed them were unable to make the right use of them; partly because none of them possessed all in an equal degree, partly because in creative power of imagination, in greatness of mind, in power and fulness of poetical ideas, they stood as far below Shakspeare, as their general conception of art and life was more one-sided, more superficial, and more unpoetic than Shakspeare's profound view, which embraced both mediæval and modern times.

* When Mézières (*Contemporains et successeurs de Sh.* pp. 25 ff., 307 ff.) classes Beaumont and Fletcher with Shakspeare instead of with Ben Jonson, and calls them Shakspeare's successors, he has overlooked, or not sufficiently estimated the fact that in spite of the external similarities of style, all the essential elements of dramatic poetry, their idea of tragedy and comedy, their mode of characterisation, their choice of subject, motive and object of their representation—in short, that the spirit and character of their compositions differ as widely from Shakspeare as they resemble Ben Jonson.

It would lead me too far, were I to characterise these poets more in detail. I must content myself with—as far as necessary—establishing my judgment by some general remarks in regard to the best of their works, and with pointing out the affinity of their idea of art and dramatic style with Ben Jonson's. *Francis Beaumont* (born 1586, d. 1615), and *John Fletcher* (born 1576, d. 1625), belonged to the higher ranks of English society, the former to the old family of Beaumont of Gracedieu in Leicestershire; the latter was a son of Dr. Richard Fletcher, bishop of Bristol, subsequently of Worcester, and after 1593 of London, and both had studied at the University of Cambridge.* Their more refined social culture was not without its influence upon their poetical works, which, as is well known, they for the most part composed conjointly. Their dramas not only give the tone of conversation of the higher ranks in a more natural and correct manner than those of Shakspeare and his associates, but are also not so full of low obscenities of the coarsest description, such as are exhibited undisguisedly and barefacedly in the later pieces of W. Rowley, Middleton, and most of the younger poets, and compared with which Shakspeare's Muse—which is frequently accused of the same offence—appears chaste and pure. And yet they show that same characteristic tendency which we meet with in Ben Jonson, Chapman, Dekker, Marston and Webster's works, of making low vices and crimes the main subjects of their pieces. Thus the action in 'The Maid's Tragedy' turns upon the adulterous relation between the King and Evadne whom he has seduced, and upon Amintor's infidelity towards Aspatia; in 'The Double Marriage' upon the non-compliance of the marriage duty on the part of the twice loved and married Virolet, about which his second consort, the otherwise noble character of Martia, breaks out into such a state of hatred and rage, that she throws herself into the arms of the Tyrant Ferrand, and becomes his mistress; in 'The False One' the action turns upon the weak-minded Ptolemy's base betrayal of his friend and patron Pompey, and upon Cæsar's carnal love for the

* See preface to the edition of 1711 in the *Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher*. With notes, etc., by Theobald, Seward, and Sympson. Vol. i., London, 1750.

beautiful Cleopatra; in 'The Bloody Brother,' upon adultery and fratricide; in 'Philaster, or Love lies a Bleeding,' upon the immoral relation between the Princess Arethusa and her page, of which she is accused by Megra, who is herself caught in the bedroom of Prince Pharamon; in the 'King and no King,' upon the passionate love between two who are supposed to be brother and sister, and which at every moment threatens to become incest; in 'The Knight of Malta,' upon Mountferrat's attempt to seduce the noble-minded Oriana by cunning and force, etc.

These pieces are justly regarded as the best of those tragedies which the two poets composed conjointly. The three last-named plays, among which we may also class another of Fletcher's works, 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' (in which, as already remarked, Shakspeare is said to have had a hand), are indeed, in reality neither tragic nor comic, but belong to the great class of dramas which were at that time called *tragi-comedies*; they are not tragedies, for they want the tragic catastrophe, and they cannot be regarded as comedies, because they not only lack the comic substance, but also the form and style of comedy. On the other hand, however, they seem closely to resemble the four first-mentioned plays, which are expressly called tragedies, in so far as in the latter the tragic element consists only in the fact that moral worthlessness or low crime, which triumph over virtue and magnanimity, in the end find their bloody punishment.

This is the general idea of tragedy, invariably met with in Beaumont and Fletcher, with various modifications. Some of their pieces, for instance the two most excellent of the above four, and in my opinion the best of all their tragedies, 'The Tragedy of Valentinian,' and 'The Maid's Tragedy,' are only apparently an exception to this. For if, in the first case Maximus, and in the second, Evadne or Amintor, could be regarded as the bearers of the tragic pathos, then, in both pieces, the idea of the tragic would certainly rise to about the same level as Shakspeare's idea. But Amintor and Maximus are treated precisely as mere secondary figures, and Evadne—who, moreover, with Melantius, the actual centre of the tragic pathos, also disappears into the background—seems at first so impudent

and insolent in her dishonour, and is only subsequently, by Melantius, brought to the consciousness of her disgrace, that for this reason alone she cannot be considered the representative of the higher idea of the tragic: Melantius, lastly, although the soul of the action, is excluded from the tragic catastrophe. According to this, however, only Valentinian and the King of Rhodes can be regarded as the heroes of the two tragedies; the former is the poor imitation of a Nero or Tiberius, the latter a reckless libertine; their downfall, therefore, excites in us as little tragic emotion as the death of the childish and weak-minded Ptolemy, or that of the worthless Septimius and Photinus in 'The False One,' or the murder of the bloody tyrant Ferrand in 'The Double Marriage.' For the Nemesis of the crime—let the latter be ever so great, and the punishment ever so bloody—is in itself neither tragic nor even poetical. Accordingly, we can at most say, that some of Beaumont's and Fletcher's tragedies border closely upon the true idea of tragedy, in so far as the punishment of the criminal, who has to play the part of the hero, seems, by his own weakness, also to involve the downfall of what is noble, great and beautiful.

Their idea of tragedy stands in so close a relation to their conception of comedy, that both, as it were, differ only quantitatively from each other. As in the former case, vice and crime are here also overtaken by the serious punishment of justice, and come to a bloody end, in the latter it is the lesser failings, moral weaknesses, follies and perversities, that meet with the censure of scorn and derision; it is these failings which morally and poetically ruin the bearers of the comic pathos. This explains the fact that, apart from the above-mentioned tragi-comedies, many other pieces of Beaumont and Fletcher also wander about on the borders between tragedy and comedy, without being able to find their way into either domain. However, the satirical tendency, which in Ben Jonson lurks in the background, does, it is true, but rarely put in an appearance, and is never directed against persons, but invariably against the thing, against some folly or bad habit; thus, for instance in 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle,' the satire is directed against that form of chivalry which

Cervantes, about the same time, ridicules in so masterly a manner, and which has long since become an anachronism, but is still popular on the stage; in 'The Nice Valour or the Passionate Madman,' against the rage for duelling; in 'The Wild-goose Chase,' against the passion of Englishmen for travelling. And yet the comic element is nevertheless generally characterised by that prosaic seriousness which, in Ben Jonson, is with difficulty concealed behind the wit and the laughable characters; except that, in them, it is not so readily discovered, because it is more successfully hidden beneath the brilliant exterior of an interesting intrigue, animated delineation of character and poetical diction.

However, it is not only the tragi-comedies, but several of the comedies as well, that contain this moralising tendency which lowers poetry into a mere means for inculcating one or other special moral or maxim, for instance, in 'The Elder Brother,' 'The Spanish Curate,' 'Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,' 'The Martial Maid,' 'The Woman's Prize or the Tamer tam'd,' 'The Noble Gentleman,' 'Women Pleas'd,' etc. In other pieces where this tendency cannot be proved to exist, as in 'The Little French Lawyer,' 'The Fair Maid of the Mill,' and 'Monsieur Thomas,' the comic element consists only in the development of a complicated, more or less interesting intrigue with a happy ending, furbished up with a number of comic characters and situations, but without any higher poetical significance. The intrigue of course turns upon love, and generally so exclusively exhibits its low, sensual side, that the obscenities render some scenes quite intolerable, with few exceptions, in all the comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, attempted adultery or something of the kind, forms, if not the centre, at least an essential motive of the action. It is only occasionally, as in 'Wit without Money,' and in 'The Wild-goose Chase,' that the comic element approaches Shakspeare's idea of it. In the first-named piece, at least, Valentine, the centre of the whole, in his contempt for money and his arrogant reliance on his wit, possesses something of that genuine poetical spirit of the *Vive la Bagatelle*, which predominates in Shakspeare's better comedies. It is a pity that he is cured in the end, and that the old uncle, and Lance, the falconer, carry their

point with their prose. Moreover the piece as a whole has something obscure and chaotic in its connection; at least, one does not exactly understand how it should suddenly come about that Valentine marries the rich and amiable widow, and relinquishes a life of mere wit. In short, it is clear from this piece that the poets (probably Fletcher only) did not feel themselves quite at home in this higher sphere of the comic, extending as it did above common reality. In by far the greater number of their comedies, they do not quit the ground of real life; like Ben Jonson, their usual object was to copy its form in manners and customs, inclinations and endeavours, opinions and ideas, in as faithful a manner as possible.

Their mode of characterisation is indeed not so one-sided as Ben Jonson's; many of their figures, although far from attaining the fulness of life and the individuality of Shakspeare's characters, are nevertheless full, round forms. Yet their characterisation throughout has something sharp, cutting and extreme, and many of their characters are so exaggerated, that they degenerate into caricatures, whereas others seem to be so at home in virtues and vices, that their individuality is lost in these, and instead of living persons they appear mere personifications of general ideas of virtue and vice. If such characters as *Ætius* in the 'The Tragedy of *Valentinian*,' *Rollo* in 'The Bloody Brother,' *Ferrand*, *Juliana* and *Martia* in 'The Double Marriage,' *Ptolemy* and *Septimus* in 'The False One,' *Bessus* and partly also *Arbaces* in 'The King and no King,' *Megra* in 'Philaster,' *Charles* with his exaggerated passion for study, and *Egremont* and *Cowley* with their caricatured courtier natures in 'The Elder Brother,' *Bartolus*, *Lopez* and *Diego* in 'The Spanish Curate,' *Lawrit* in 'The Little French Lawyer,' *Shamont*, *Lapet* and "the passionate lord" in 'The Nice Valour,' and others, are examined somewhat closely, it will be found that they are as different from Shakspeare's characters and his mode of characterisation as most of Ben Jonson's figures, though in a different way. The fault obviously lies, partly in the erroneous endeavours of both poets towards great tragic or comic effects, partly in the want of creative imagination, and the preponderance

of reflection and tendency, in consequence of which they cut out their characters too much for definite objects, and indeed give external definitions sharply and correctly, but are incapable of giving them the wealth and variety of the inner life. This want is especially apparent in pieces like 'The Lover's Progress,' 'The Prophetess' and 'Cupid's Revenge,' in which they make an attempt to introduce apparitions, magic and prophecy, in short, creatures from the superlunar world of the imagination. That these unsuccessful attempts are far inferior to Shakspeare's excellent productions, must be admitted even by their most decided admirers. In fact Beaumont and Fletcher possessed as little feeling for the poetical significance of mediæval belief and superstition, as Ben Jonson. Like the latter, they comprehended it rather but from the intellectual point of view, and accordingly treated it with contempt, or pursued it with scorn and ridicule, as for instance, in 'The Bloody Brother,' and 'The Fair Maid of the Inn.'

Beaumont and Fletcher exhibit their greatest power in their treatment of *language*; their diction is, in most cases, truly poetical, as easy, fluent and animated in comedy, as energetic and pathetic—even to grandeur—in tragedy. The expression of special emotions, of special feelings or passions are in them so perfect in this respect, that Shakspeare is but little in advance of them. Masterly, for instance, is the scene in 'Valentinian,' in which Maximus first meets his wife—after she has been dishonoured—where he gives utterance to his grief and indignation, in the most affecting words. Excellent also, in the same tragedy, are the descriptions of the death of Ætius, and the agonies of the poisoned Valentinian; excellent is Amintor's grief and Melantius' rage in 'The Maid's Tragedy'; excellent (although but an imitation of Shakspeare's Ophelia) the sufferings and madness of the jailor's daughter in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen'; and similarly, more or less distinguished pictures may be found in 'The King or No King,' 'Philaster,' 'The Double Marriage' and other pieces. Yet they are mere pictures, masterly portraits of striking truth and animation; we miss the depth, beauty and elevation of a truly poetical view of life, we miss the ideality of the subject, by which alone the portrait can become a

great work of art, and in fact, which alone can raise the special into the sphere of poetry. Besides this, their diction, although considerably higher than Ben Jonson's, nevertheless shows a certain resemblance to his style, in so far as, in most cases, it is sharp and pointed; their diction wants the softness, the flexibility and elasticity which is capable not only of rendering clear and fully developed thoughts and well known feelings and passions, but also of reflecting those embryos of the mind, those faint, indefinite emotions of the soul which hover in the twilight of semi-consciousness, and are so frequently the actual sources of our actions and destinies; it wants that delicate, picturesque haze of distance which fills up all gaps and intermediate spaces, which softens the sharpness of the outlines and rounds off all edges and corners. They even have, in common with Ben Jonson, the prosaic trick of furbishing up their dramas with passages from ancient writers in more or less faithful translations. In 'The Bloody Brother,' there are several passages from Seneca's 'Thebais,' and in 'The False One,' the description of the battle of Pharselus, and the speeches of Achoreus and Photinus in the council of Ptolemy, are borrowed from Lucan.

At all events the art of language of itself alone does not make the poet; it can do no more than provide the beauty and elevation of ideas with an appropriate dress, if this be wanting, then the dress is but a dress. Beaumont and Fletcher are evidently poor in ideas, that is, they want, not so much special and poetical thoughts, appropriate maxims, ingenious remarks, but assuredly those flashes of the mind which reveal all life from a new aspect, which penetrate into its inmost nature, and give views from the centre over the whole, in a breadth and clearness such as, in fact, can be obtained only from a centre. This want manifests itself not only in the superficiality of their conception of tragedy and comedy, but, especially, in their mode of *composition*. While Shakspeare, as we shall see, founded his dramas, in most cases, upon ideas in this sense, we find in them only some special moral maxim made, so to say, the *moral* of the poem, of which the above-mentioned comedies and

tragedies with their moralising tendency may be regarded as examples. But such special maxims, owing to their very nature, express but a very small part of life and humanity, and accordingly, in their narrowness, are unable to give the dramatic work of art—which is to present full and complete men—an inner organic unity. Hence Beaumont and Fletcher endeavour to obtain this unity in a different way, in a more external manner. In this they again meet Ben Jonson. For as the latter, in following the Aristotelian unities, endeavoured, at all events, to adhere to the unity of time and place, and in most cases dropped the unity of action, so they, on the contrary, strove most towards attaining the unity of action, and disregarded the unities of place and time. In many of their better pieces—such as ‘Valentinian,’ ‘The Bloody Brother,’ ‘A King or no King,’ ‘The Knight of Malta,’ ‘The Elder Brother,’ ‘Wit without Money,’ ‘Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,’—they have, by the rigorous development of an all-embracing intrigue, succeeded perfectly in giving the drama an external finish, such as is not met with, to the same extent, in any one of Jonson’s pieces; in others, such as ‘Philaster,’ ‘The Maid’s Tragedy,’ ‘The Double Marriage,’ ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen,’ ‘The Little French Lawyer,’ we indeed still find side-paths running along by the high road of the action, but these are so closely, so smoothly and so naturally connected with the former, that the unity of the whole is not disturbed. This again shows the finer tact and the higher poetical talent of the two friends. For of the three Aristotelian unities, the unity of action is the most important, the most necessary; without it the unities of place and time, even though ever so strictly observed, cannot accomplish anything. But even the unity of action alone produces in all cases but a certain *external* finish; it does not necessarily include the *ideal* character of the drama, and if the latter is not supported and penetrated with an inner intellectual unity, the whole piece will nevertheless internally fall asunder. In ‘Valentinian,’ for instance—in spite of the strict observation of the unity of the intrigue which turns throughout upon the outrage committed upon Lucina—the fate of Ætius has not the slightest connection with

that of Maximus and of Valentinian; and thus the piece in reality describes three different careers of the most different significance, and these run on by the side of one another, without in any way affecting each other, and accordingly, the piece when carefully examined is found to be divided into three separate dramas. The external unity of action cannot produce what it ought, except when combined with a kind of characterisation which—as in Greek tragedy—represents the persons in typical *ideality*, as the *universally recognised* prototypes and models of humanity. If, as is invariably the case in the English drama, these are so strongly *individualised*, that the *personal*, the *special*, are peculiarly prominent in them, then the unity of the action is not merely unable to embrace the variety of careers, but the more strictly it is adhered to, the more it disturbs the general applicability of the represented action—its significance for all mankind—and the drama degenerates into a dramatised anecdote, or at most has the value of a good historical representation of a single incident.

I shall pass over Massinger, Ford, Field, and the less important talents which followed Beaumont and Fletcher; for although Philip Massinger (born in 1584, appeared as a dramatic poet after 1606, probably not till 1609–10, and died in 1639) is completely their equal in poetic gifts, still his whole peculiarity consists only in the fact that, having a bold, energetic mind agitated by strong feelings, he everywhere lays on his colours more powerfully; hence, the merits as well as the defects of Beaumont and Fletcher's dramatic style appear in him more decided and more glaring.* It was, in fact, not my intention to bring

* Thus for instance the superficial, unpoetical conception of tragedy in his *Duke of Milan*, *The Unnatural Combat*, *The Fatal Dowry*, and others (*The Virgin Martyr* forms an exception, but is in reality no tragedy, but a dramatised legend, in which an angel—the page Angelo—plays the chief part, and reminds us of Calderon's *Autos*). In his comedies the satirical element is more decidedly maintained, especially in *The City Madam*, *The New Way to pay Old Debts* and others. In these two comedies, as well as in *The Parliament of Love*, *The Maid of Honour*, *The Picture*, *The Guardian*, we find an undisguised inclination to lead the representation in the end back to a common moral, an inclination which in him even occupies a place in his tragedies, such as

the separate poets before the reader, each in his individuality, but merely to explain in a general way, in what relations the two Schools or tendencies distinguished above, stood to each other, and in what way each endeavoured to solve the problem set before it by the dramatic art of the day. The problem, as we have seen, consisted in giving the English drama its appropriate artistic form, that is, to combine the variety of individual characters and of single deeds and destinies (such as life and history present) under one unity, not only capable externally, of rounding off this variety, and of arranging it, but also of being able to give it an ethical character and a general significance. The result of our enquiry is that neither of the two Schools succeeded in solving the problem. Both struck out upon exactly opposite paths, of which, however, the one was as wrong as the other. The contemporaries and direct successors of Greene and Marlowe looked for unity in a vague, ideal generality by enclosing, as it were, the multiplicity, the individuality of characters and actions in the wide, dilatable circle of a general poetic mood, to which circle—like Heywood and others in some pieces—they certainly gave a peculiar, and in some dramas a characteristic colouring by means of a prevailing, definite tendency. But this circle had no

in *The Unnatural Combat*, *The Duke of Milan*, *The Fatal Dowry*. To make up for this Massinger pays less attention to the external unity of the action; his *Unnatural Combat* embraces two entirely different actions, the one of which turns upon old Malefort, the other upon Theocrine; *The Virgin Martyr* has three actions; *The Renegado* even more. His characters, lastly, are even more exaggerated into caricatures or weakened into abstract ideas; thus the younger Novall, Laladam, and Aymer in *The Fatal Dowry*, Greedy and Marraill in *The New Way to pay Old Debts*, Dorothea, Theophilus, and Sapritius in *The Virgin Martyr*, and most of the characters in *The Duke of Milan* and *The City Madam*. Ford's best piece is his historical tragedy, *Perkin Warbeck*. His other dramas are more or less unimportant, in comparison with Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger's best works. A collection of their works exists under the title of, *The Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford, with an Introduction by H. Coleridge*, London, 1839. For further details about the year of Massinger's death, see *Collier's Memoirs of the principal Actors*, etc., p. xiii.

centre and the periphery was so wide and uncertain, that its boundaries were lost in an imperceptible distance. The definite tendency, however, did not determine and control the whole, but was, in fact, merely an element which especially asserted itself, was no general idea, but a single thought, and, as such, not sufficiently profound and comprehensive to include all the separate parts. Ben Jonson and his associates, on the other hand, looked for unity in the sphere of real, numerical individuality; they understood it after the manner of the ancients, that is, as an external, sensually perceptible, plastic unity. As the unity of place and of time it had, as it were, to be the framework which surrounded and held together the multifarious figures, or, as the unity of the intrigue, of the plot and of the motive, it had to determine the separate deeds and destinies, just as a cause determines its effect. But the external frame only touches the canvas, not the picture itself; and the unity or rather the singleness of the intrigue is incapable of giving to the individual characters, actions, and destinies, the general significance which is expressed by them. And by attempting to trace back the representation to a single moral maxim, they did not get beyond Heywood, with his similar endeavours, and moreover, by the admixture of a prosaic element they robbed their poems of the best part of their poetical lustre.

CHAPTER V.

SHAKSPEARE'S DRAMATIC STYLE, AND HIS IDEA OF THE DRAMA.

THE question may now arise, did Shakspeare succeed in solving the problem which lay before him, and by what means did he solve it?

In the first place, it was through the profound and clear conception he possessed as to the nature of dramatic art which, even though he may not have originally possessed it, he nevertheless acquired in the course of his poetical career.

He himself expresses his own opinion upon it, when he makes Hamlet (iii. 2) say that the object of the drama is 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to *nature*; to show *virtue* her own feature, *scorn* her own image, and the very *age and body of the time* his form and pressure.'*

It is clear from this explanation that Shakspeare sides with the English popular theatre; his wish was to keep to 'nature,' to the reality exhibited in life and history; he rejects those efforts which seek to reanimate the unnatural drama of the ancients—unnatural in a double respect, owing to its plastic ideality and also its foreign character. At the same time, however,—and this distinguishes him from the English popular poets before and beside him—he gives the drama an essentially *ethical* relation. He does not intend to paint mere characters, to describe mere human actions and)

* According to S. Johnson the word *age* in Shakspeare signifies "any period of time attributed to something as the whole or part of its duration," and hence, in the present case, not this or that century (about the sixteenth), but more generally *every* period, the *whole* course of time, that is, history in general without limitation to any definite period. The words *form* and *pressure* do not signify merely external outlines (acts, events, customs, habits, etc.), but are intended to denote that the drama is also to represent the *character* of the age.

destinies, feelings and emotions, etc., or even to analyse and portray passion physiologically, as a given phenomenon of nature (as H. Taine supposes); but as little is it his intention to play the part of a moralising censor, a policeman of the law, or a schoolmaster of morals; his object rather is to bring into view the innermost essence of virtue, the eternal idea of what is good, in its contrast to sin and vice. He thereby gives the drama its ideality back in another form; it is not that the plastic ideal is to be embodied, but that the *ethical* ideal is to be pointed at. He who denies that Shakspeare's dramas possess this ethico-ideal character, and regards him only as the poet of nature, the realist, the physiologist of passion, places him below those semi-poets who are overflowing with great intentions, but are incapable of giving utterance to them. And lastly, when Shakspeare sets the drama the problem of also showing its form and character to 'the age and body of the time,' he thereby wishes to say that he does not exhibit mere specialities, special characters, acts, events, etc., but that it is his intention, at the same time, to represent the universal, the spirit of all times and peoples, the invariable sameness of human nature, which is borne, determined and defined by the special. In short, Shakspeare's idea of the nature of the drama may be expressed in the words: the drama is to be the poetical representation of universal history. It is, so to speak, to hold a mirror to nature, that is, not only to imitate nature, but to lead it to a knowledge of itself, and man to a knowledge of his nature. For this end it was above all things necessary that he should have a full insight into the nature of good and evil, of virtue and vice. But, for this it was also necessary that he should have a clear conception of the object of human existence, of the form and progress of the historical development, and of the successive stages of human culture, in short, of the character of 'the age and body of the time.' Accordingly, with him the subject for dramatic representation is, in reality, universal history itself, its object to co-operate in effecting the object of universal history, in obtaining a knowledge of man's nature, as the fundamental condition of all true knowledge and of all right actions and intentions.

But, it may be asked, is not this the aim and object of the epos and of lyric poetry? Is it not the object and aim of all art? In a wider sense certainly, but not in the narrower sense in which the representation of history becomes historical only when bringing into view the progressive development of human nature, life and action, by means of past, present and future, and when describing the motives, the development and the object of actions and events. The epos represents history only in the past, where the action already appears as a thing completed, not in the act of coming into being, but as a closed existence, a pure fact. It is *narrative* poetry, which reports what has taken place; hence, it describes the human mind, not so much from its inner side, its subjectivity, in which, by virtue of its self-determination, it first creates history, and in its development is itself nascent history, but more from the side, and in the form in which it advances out of its subjectivity, in which the self-determining principle has become determinate, and the will has passed into action, and in which, therefore, it has itself become objective in actions and sufferings, and thus appears to have already *become* history. But it is only mediately that the other side comes to be represented, that is, only in so far as the accomplished action lies at the foundation of the will and its motive, and continues to live and act in the definiteness of self-determination. The epos, accordingly, may be called the poetry of the past, the *plastic* of poetry, in so far as the internal, mental life is brought into view through it, wholly absorbed in the outwardness of form, wholly in its objective, sensually perceptible definiteness. And for this reason alone, the outward form cannot be merely individual and real as in actual life—for the past, the haziness of distance effaces the sharp individual outlines and gives the figures a more symmetrical and more formally beautiful shape, but must invariably have a general and ideal shape; all the heroes of epic poetry, therefore, appear as ideal figures which have become typical (in Homer all are godlike heroes, cowardly Paris not less than brave Hector and Achilles). But their subjective peculiarities are brought forward only in so far as they are expressed in their actions and sufferings. And as the

freedom of the will is neutralised in the accomplished deed and in the definiteness of self-determination, everything in the epos appears necessary; history in its past shows the stamp of unalterable definiteness. The deity or destiny, the inviolable order of nature or superhuman powers and beings, in short, some higher power rules the events of the epic world; the *dramatis personæ* are themselves filled with the consciousness of this necessity, their deeds appear prompted by the deity, their sufferings brought on by divine ordinance. It may, therefore, also be said that the epos reveals the human mind pre-eminently from its physical aspect, from that point of view which appears determined by descent, race and nationality, nature and temperament, by innate capabilities and qualities, merits and defects. This is probably the reason why the genuine epos is invariably the poetry of nature; it originates on the first stage of mental development as the poetical expression of a view of life in which man still comprehends himself more especially in his actual definiteness, and the determining power as a higher and superhuman force.

Lyric poetry forms an organic contrast to the epos when regarded from the standpoint of action and of history. It is generally acknowledged that the lyric poet describes his own self, his life and the workings of his mind. and that lyric poetry thus belongs to the subjective side of human nature. But the lyric poet is a true poet, in so far as he depicts not only his own subjectivity, but in so far as he portrays the subjectivity of the human mind, of which his own is but the special manifestation; in this case only is his delineation true and of general applicability. As lyric poetry, in this sense, depicts the mind in its inner subjective life, those agitations and emotions which spring up from within, it exhibits the mind in the ferment of coming into being, the moods and states of the mind which may result in actions, events and destinies, but which have not, as yet, come to be. In the ferment of coming into being, there is as yet no determinateness and stability of form; the mind does not rise out of itself, but is absorbed within itself, agitated by the impressions of the outer world, by its sensations, humours, feelings and thoughts. In itself it is pure

motion, an animated correlation between itself and the outer world, a perpetual coming and going from within to without, and from without to within.

Lyric poetry is, therefore, as fluctuating and undulating as the feelings; its poetical form is a free, self-chosen variation of rhythms and metres; it may be termed the music of poetry, without, however, implying that every lyric poem requires to be the expression of feelings. The moods and states of the mind are not necessarily feelings in the narrower sense of the word, and lyric poetry can, in fact, also describe a resolve or an action, but only in so far as, like the plant in the maternal soil, it has its root in the inner nature of the mind itself. In so far it may be called the poetry of freedom, in contrast to the epos. For in the ferment of coming into being, everything appears to be developing itself in and out of the mind; its conditions may perhaps be occasioned, but not produced from without. On the contrary, in its inner nature, the mind is itself much more occasion and cause, and what it hopes, loves and believes, what it hates, fears and doubts rests, in the end, in itself and in its own individuality. And thus—maintaining the standpoint of the action, that is, of history—lyric poetry, in contrast to the epos, may be called the poetry of the future. For the sensations and feelings, strivings and emotions, thoughts and reflections which it describes, are the motives, the roots and germs from which, with the co-operation of outward circumstances and relations, our actions proceed; they carry our doings and sufferings in their bosom, they foreshadow in themselves our future actions and destinies. Lastly, while the epos, in its sensuous, symbolico-mythical view, places the deity in visible activity by the side of man and his history, lyric poetry, according to its nature, conceives the deity in a more inward, ethical manner, in living interaction with the human mind and its freedom. For this reason lyric poetry, if not exclusively, is pre-eminently the form of religious poetry, because religion is based upon the direct conviction of the inseparable and intrinsic relation subsisting between the human mind and the divine, and between the divine mind and the human.

Dramatic poetry, on the other hand, may be termed the poetry of the present, for this reason alone, that it describes

the action as happening at the moment, and brings it before the spectator in its direct presence. The present is, however, in so far the union of past and future, as the past continually proceeds in it, and the future arises out of it. In the same sense, when regarded from the standpoint of the action and of history, the drama appears as the union of epic and lyric poetry, and to embrace the two contrasts. This is not meant to imply that epic and lyric poetry are only integral parts of the drama, only subordinate forms or stages of transition, and existing only so as to lead towards dramatic art, and to be dissolved into it. What we intend to imply is rather that the drama describes the human mind not merely in its subjective inwardness, in its hidden agitations and emotions, but at the same time also in the objective determinateness which arises out of it, and consequently does not depict mere facts or mere conditions, but the *actions* themselves, i.e., events which arise objectively out of the conditions of the mind under the co-operation of the outer world. In so far it may be said that the drama is at once plastic and musical, epic and lyrical; it has as much fixity of external appearance as movement of internal life. In so far it exhibits freedom not only in contrast, but also in its unison with necessity, both supplementing each other in animated relation and interaction, determining and defining the historical development as self-acting organs, being themselves only different sides of one organic whole. In so far dramatic art seems in fact to be pre-eminently, and in the narrower sense, the poetical reflection of history, inasmuch as, of course, it is only the co-operation of these agents that produces history as history; and the life of a nation becomes historical only at that point where, being conscious of those agents as the levers of its development and formation, it distinguishes them in their activity.

If every action, in the historical sense, arises out of the interpenetration of the past, present and future, out of the correlation of the general state and existing order of things, with the internal and external condition of the agent, out of the co-operation of freedom and necessity, then Shakspeare is pre-eminently an historical poet. No dramatist knows so well as he, how to bring before the spectator—

with such equally vivid clearness—not only earlier and present conditions, past actions, and endeavours, as well as the thoughts and doings of the dramatic characters which reach into the future, but also how to represent the general order of things, the condition of the state and the character of the age in question. No one knows so well as he, how to place these motives in such lively interaction with one another, that the action which proceeds out of them is, as it were, seen to rise and grow, like the planted seed which sprouts forth, unfolds and becomes fully developed, till its branches—that is, the action, according to its meaning and substance, has spread in all directions. That which is effected in the ancient drama by the chorus, to be, as it were, the echo of the general voice of the people, the witness of its state of mind, of its judgment upon the exhibited action—the representation of the character of the age and of the people, and of the co-operating general conditions and relations—all this is supplied in Shakspeare, by those frequently occurring scenes, in which the crowd and servants, army and people, the highest officers of the state and their representatives, take an active part in the action, which is thus enabled to place the general position of affairs, the spirit and character of the age, in due relation with the sentiments and actions of the chief personages. That which in ancient art, agreeably to its nature, is conceived more ideally, and stands in plastic separation side by side, appears more in an historical light, and in living reciprocal interaction. For it is only that which is truly historical, which does not merely stand forth objectively as the individual event in word or action, but which also exercises a perceptible influence upon the *general* formation of human affairs, that possesses a subject of *general* applicability, and contributes to the realisation of a universally significant idea. Everything else belongs to the, in itself, unhistorical life of the individual.

But the power of history, at the same time, makes use of those unhistorical endeavours of the individual (which are directed only to special interests) when exhibiting an historically significant deed, an historical idea; so that the non-historical may become historical. Such is the case in Shakspeare; with him everything is emotion, every word

dramatic, every scene a progress of the action; with him nothing stands alone, every speech, every act—even though apparently purely personal—has its reference to the whole, is an organic member of the one action, and essentially contributes to the development of the one fundamental idea. And yet each figure, at the same time, has its own movement, its freedom and independence, each pursues its special interests, places itself in its appropriate relation to the centre of the whole, and comprehends it in its own peculiar manner. This struggle for and against, this variety of colours, and the refraction of the one ray of light, makes the poem—at least in those of Shakspeare's maturer works—stand forth in a completeness, vividness and distinctness, that the meaning may indeed be disputed but the interest in the representation increases and deepens with every step.

In this sense, Shakspeare's thoroughly historical mode of representation constitutes the characteristic and chief peculiarities of his poetry, and these at the same time are the means and levers by which he raises his drama into the poetical image of history. It in the first place produces the decided peculiarity of his *diction*. The latter, in general, reflects the character of the English language in a specially pregnant manner. All that I mentioned above in regard to it: its bone and sinew, the looseness of its combination, its indifference towards the laws of logic—occasioned by its poverty of grammatical forms—its meagreness in expressions of the abstract and the general, together with its fulness and precision as regards everything occurring within the sphere of practical life, of intention and action—all this applies equally to Shakspeare's diction. But in him the *dialogical* character of the language—spoken of above—is strongly and decidedly prominent. Shakspeare never philosophises, he nowhere makes general reflections which rest solely upon themselves; the most solitary monologues of his characters are but conversations between the person and his surroundings, between the contemplative mind and the nature of things. Shakspeare also never merely narrates; his accounts and descriptions again are more like dialogues, inasmuch as they not merely describe the objects in question, but also

the lively connection between them and the sensations, feelings and thoughts of the narrator called forth by them. Shakspeare can indeed draw forth into light—from their hidden depths—the soul's most tender, most secret and darkest emotions, but his sentiments and feelings, although often expressed in high-sounding lyrics, in the most harmonious melodies, nevertheless internally possess the character of dialogue, and their linguistic form resembles those pieces of music in which the different musical motives are harmoniously made to concert with one another. With all this, his diction almost invariably shows flashes and streaks of wit, in the wider sense of the word, and that faculty of uniting the most disparate, and of discovering some similarity in the most different and some difference in the most similar. It, therefore, almost continually (moves along in images and similes which frequently cause surprise, as much by their appropriateness as by the strangeness of their subject; but these rarely appear carried out minutely, are short and abrupt, the one passing over into the other in overflowing abundance. This gives the language a peculiar internal restlessness, as if a sappy, over-ripe life were pulsating in it, as if it were swelling with hidden springs, seeking at every moment to burst their bounds; it is only on rare occasions—but still too frequently—that this surging and swelling degenerates into a bombastic, high-flown and inflated style. This throbbing is in fact not the soft, round, undulating line of beauty; the rhythm of the Shakspearian diction generally resembles the short, pointed breakers of the sea on precipitous coasts, where the in-rolling wave meets the one rebounding from the shore. Hence it never falls into effeminateness and sentimentality; its expression of tenderness and grace has rather something piquant, its beauty something vigorous and energetic, its sublimity something bold, audacious, occasionally something wild. It is rich, sometimes too rich in puns, antitheses and points; it delights in surprising the reader with strange, dazzling expressions, unexpected turns and apparent digressions; but it is invariably in the highest degree animated, pregnant and appropriate, for it does not receive its substance from without, from recipient observation, but from a produc-

tive imagination which works in it, and which not only names and describes the object, but also provides it with life and animation.

These peculiarities of Shakspeare's diction, however, are not equally prominent everywhere. His language is, in fact, different in his different works; his earlier dramas, as already remarked, differ somewhat in character from his later ones, yet this is in reality a difference in degree only; the inner essence is everywhere the same. In his earliest works his diction is still occasionally awkward, obscure and unequal, first too rapid, then too slow and stagnating, more frequently exaggerated into bombast, but never feeble and empty. In the works belonging to the middle of his career, when he had already gained a firm footing in the domain of art, it becomes more equal and smoother, clearer and more harmonious, it gains both in external richness and in internal fulness, tenderness and solidity, without losing anything in the power of its cadences and the force of its flow. In his later dramas, lastly, it becomes more and more absorbed in itself; the waves become mightier and ever mightier, and, in hastening with vehement rapidity towards their goal, dash against the coast in foaming breakers. Greater depth and power, together with a striking sharpness of individual expression, an overflowing fulness and a certain ruggedness of speech,—which apparently jumps aside from the subject, but in reality, by keeping the general connection in view, seems to throw all the brighter light upon it—lastly, a greater conciseness, often harsh and angular, but concentrated round the inmost centre, a brevity which is not external (quantitative), but internal (qualitative), and is produced by the hurry and directness with which it proceeds towards its goal—these are the characteristics of Shakspeare's last works.

His language, in general, is neither always noble and sublime, nor always graceful and beautiful. 'Our sweetest Shakspeare,' as Pope calls him, is, at the same time, the roughest and harshest of all poets. In him we find side by side the great and the small, the sublime and the low, the highest poetical flight by the side of the ordinary phraseology of every-day life; and often enough his

equivocal jokes, his ugly, vulgar expressions and images, his mention of vices and allusion to things which ought not to be touched upon in good society, offend not only the feelings of propriety, but those of beauty, in all finely-strung minds. Jokes and allusions of this kind were, it is true, permitted in those times even in the highest and most intellectual circles; but even though Shakspeare is only paying tribute to the bad taste and coarse ideas of his day, still it remains a fault which we have to acknowledge as such. And yet in him it is a fault which, in almost all cases, can be removed by the omission or change of a word or of a line, causing no essential detriment to the power, the beauty and truly dramatic form of his language, nay to a certain extent it belongs to and is, at least, explained by the language. For through all these differences, contrasts and defects there runs a primary form, which I am inclined to call the poetical language of *history*. Shakspeare's diction is throughout dramatic and therefore historical. With him speech is invariably a mental *act*, which belongs as individually to the speaker, as it is an essential member of the represented action. The feelings, the thoughts, the reflections, nowhere appear in naked purity, but are ever coloured and formed by the energy of the will and deed, whose nature and substance form the fundamental principle of all human personality—the *character* of the individual. It is only as characters, by their will and action, that men become historical and dramatic. If the expression of the inner life, if every word, in this sense, is an *act*, it necessarily follows in the first place, that it must everywhere appear dependent upon the person, the situation, the humour and the condition of the speaker, whether or not it is in perfect accord with the finer feelings of propriety or beauty. But it also follows that the language must invariably possess firmness, precision, definiteness, that it must not allow itself free course, but, like the act, be connected with the given subject, and must endeavour vigorously to grasp and to master it. It is only when the soul retires within itself, when in solitary contemplation, and where the power of the will co-operates but dreamily, that language can display itself in a long and even flow. If the mind is greatly agitated,

and takes an active part in life and its affairs, then the language, even where it merely expresses internal conditions, will have to take part in the more rapid movement, the restless, sometimes obstructed, sometimes accelerated and occasionally digressing course, as well as in the exertions, the decisiveness and terseness of active life. The breadth and flow which belong to the mode of expressing feelings, contemplation and philosophical research, is in general undramatic and unhistorical; the historical language requires force, conciseness of wit, sharpness of thought. The language must necessarily be as varied, great and small, sublime and low, beautiful and ugly as the historical act itself. But as, at the same time, it is only a living member of one great action, of the idea which directs the course of events, we lose sight of the low, ugly and commonplace in the importance, grandeur and beauty of the idea; supported and animated by this, it becomes idealised itself.

As regards versification, Shakspeare shows the deepest appreciation of those great advantages which, as we have seen, blank verse offered to the dramatic poet. No one handles it with greater skill; no one knows better how to adapt it to all turns of the action; no one is more capable of raising it to the height of the most high-sounding lyrical rhythms, and of again lowering it into the plains of prose; no one knows better how to make use of the change between metrical and non-metrical language for enlivening the representation. Here also the variety of the forms—which sometimes pass gently one into the other, sometimes contrasted sharply—corresponds with the change, elasticity and the many-sidedness of historical life.

CHAPTER VI.

SHAKSPEARE'S MODE OF CHARACTERISATION.

SHAKSPEARE'S mode of characterisation is no less entirely the expression and organ of his idea of the nature of the drama than his diction. His profound knowledge of mankind, as Schlegel says, has become proverbial; and yet with him this is by no means the result of shrewd, empirical observations; such a knowledge of the world and of man might make a good diplomatist, moralist or trader, but not a poet. His accurate descriptions of so many various, most abnormal and unusual states of the mind, such as melancholy, idiocy, madness, somnambulism, etc., all of which he cannot possibly have learned from his own experience, prove rather that they must have been the result of his deep poetical insight into human nature and life in general. The poet, owing to his creative imagination, always has the true archetype (*είδος*—*idea*) of man in view; the greater the poet, the purer and clearer, the more perfect, the more independent is he of external influences. This is the true *ideal* of all art. It neither contradicts, nor does it in any way deviate from, or in any way go beyond reality, it rather, so to say, contains all reality and embraces the whole variety of every possible individual character. It can be exhibited only in separate characters, without being quite exhausted by them, either singly or collectively. For it always appears in some new and peculiar form in every individual limitation, in every special position of circumstances, at every new turn of history; for, of course, all sides of the external world invariably belong to it as co-operating organs of its development and formation. It is itself nothing more than the spirit of humanity in its original nature, and in its historical development. All Shakspeare's characters are but so many different forms of the archetype deter-

mined by time and locality, and individualised by the measure and the special composition of general human qualities, powers and capabilities, virtues and defects, in short, special impersonations of one primary personality. And this is the case with every genuine poet.

Shakspeare's peculiarity and greatness consist, on the one hand, in the fact that while in other poets this primary personality has received a more or less special form, a physiognomy of its own, from the character of its century and its nation, and is obscured by one-sided interests, ideas and tendencies of the age, in him this primary personality is conceived with greater purity and originality, and for this very reason is exhibited in greater completeness and in a preponderating variety of individual characters. This is why, after more than two hundred years, we meet with many old acquaintances among his characters; this is why his Romans, although 'incarnate Englishmen,' as Goethe calls them, are nevertheless thorough Romans as well; for even Englishmen, under Roman institutions and in Roman times, would think and act precisely in the same manner; this is why his Frenchmen and Italians, his Danes and Germans, and those characters belonging to the most different epochs—although to some extent 'incarnate Englishmen' of the sixteenth century—are nevertheless complete and life-like personalities such as may still be met with on this earth of ours, in different dresses and forms, and in different relations and circumstances. C. Hebler makes the excellent remark: 'Goethe's characters reflect his own self; Schiller's, in the first place, rise above him up to his own ideals, but in this short circuitous path, they also point to the poet who is personally full of these ideals; in Shakspeare's characters, however, we completely forget the poet himself. He, as a rule, neither gives his own experience like Goethe, nor does he pass before us as a person full of feeling and of thought, like Schiller, but makes the impression of being able to represent the life of every possible kind of foreign character as if it were his own; . . . he shows a power of transformation and self-abnegation, in which no Garrick can equal him.'

The greatness and peculiarity of Shakspeare's genius is

manifested, on the other hand, in the fact that without passing beyond the limits of individuality, without in the slightest degree idealizing the *special* figures—in other words, in spite of the sharpest and fullest *individualisation* of his characters—he nevertheless contrives to give the whole an *ideal* and *generally* applicable significance. This he indeed accomplishes more especially by his mode of composition, of which we shall have to speak presently; but he also accomplishes it by his mode of individualisation. He does not individualise like Ben Jonson, by setting forth on one side, special features of character, or like Beaumont and Fletcher, by exaggeration and distortion, but by displaying the full wealth of the elements, forces and qualities of human nature in the character of his hero, and at the same time by knowing how to give this fulness of features, a peculiar and individual form in combining them, and rounding them off into the personal I. If, accordingly, we examine the elements of the material of which his figures consist, we might fancy that we have before us but the one, general and ever the same substance of human nature; but if we examine the form which this substance has received at his hands, we perceive the greatest variety of special and individual features. How different, for instance, are Romeo and Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth, Juliet and Desdemona, and yet the elements of which all these characters are formed are essentially the same. The complete and perfect man, however, at the same time, always has something ideal, something of a proto- or archetype, it depends only upon his not being represented piecemeal, but in his entirety, only upon his inmost nature being revealed; the depth of the individuality—provided only it has true depth—always contains the general and eternal idea of human nature, but this is frequently stunted and deformed. Hence because in Shakspeare's characters we see clearly into their inmost nature, they appear as Goethe says, 'to be mere natural men, and yet are not so,' that is, they appear only to be individuals of a perfectly individual form and colour, and are nevertheless in reality ideal figures of a higher and more general significance.

We have already shown that Shakspeare, as a poet,

seems to have been but little affected by the special tendencies and ideas of his time. It is only the genuine poetical colouring of life—the considerate *power of action*, the *strength of will* and of *character*, the enthusiastic *rise* of a nation which, after long internal struggles, again feels itself at unity, and its power preserved by brilliant actions abroad—in short, only the *general* principles in the mind of the English nation towards the end of the sixteenth century—that are reflected in Shakspeare's poems, and which stamp them with the impress of their age. These, however, were in fact genuine dramatic features. In the drama, for the very reason that it is as much history as poetry, every figure must appear in the light of a general poetico-historical view of life, as the expression of some general feature of the time and nation, but pre-eminently from the side of its *energy of mind*, its *strength of character* and of *will*. All other qualities and faculties, conditions and states of mind can assert themselves only in so far as they are penetrated and determined by this energy, and stand in living relation to the doings of the several persons, as well as to the action of the whole.

This is Shakspeare's method of delineating character: this historical form of characterisation, at least, is the general principle followed by him in his descriptions of character, and is the second peculiar merit of his dramatic style.

If this is the correct method, it follows as a matter of course that it is an error if—as some critics think necessary—every dramatic figure is delineated down to the smallest detail, in all its special relations, merits and defects, feelings and thoughts, inclinations and disinclinations; in short, if every character is laid perfectly bare before the spectator. In such a case we should have one psychological section after the other, as in an anatomical theatre; every hero would, there, be his own chamberlain, and himself conduct us through the various recesses and crevices of his nature, and long-spun soliloquies, unmotivated confessions, would alternate with ebullitions of sentiment and reflection. But this detailed account, and the complete register of all qualities and quantities, would

end in nothing being accomplished, the organic unity of the conception of the character would be lost. The world's history has no time to listen to such prolix splutterings, and moreover, does not leave any one time to indulge in them. The object of dramatic poetry is not to reveal one or other special human character in its complete nakedness—this would be a pitiful art and not very different from the work of a common portrait painter. If it is to depict the human mind in the multiplicity of its independent and individual parts, determined and supported by the circumstances of its historical existence, then every separate character can be allowed scope for its own development, only in so far as it is a living and necessary part of the whole, *i.e.*, only in so far as it takes an essential part in the development of the action, and in the course of history.

If this is its object, then it is no less a mistake if the drama—in place of introducing definite, living individuals—allows mere general, hollow, abstract forms or generic ideas of men to make vain efforts to appear like real men. In this case, instead of having upon the boards, 'which represent the world,' a despotic prince, we should have an abstract tyrant divested of all humanity, a mere pattern of vices and crimes; instead of an ardent youth, full of feeling and thought, and hence all the more subject to human weaknesses, we should have a general young man, animated only by susceptibility and imagination, only by magnanimity and self-sacrifice or by some self-created ideals, and who is nothing but enthusiasm, passion and fire; instead of a weak man we should have weakness; instead of a fool we should have folly. By this means, however, history, in place of being supported and developed, in its truth, by living individual characters, would appear more like a play-ball of general ideas abstracted from human conditions and qualities or from special views, tendencies and interests of the time; in place of the full and complete man we should have single human powers and capabilities, virtues and vices in masks, giving us an allegorical history of the world, as much like reality as a soap-bubble to the terrestrial globe.

A careful reader will readily perceive how well Shak-

speare has succeeded in hitting the right medium between the two extremes, how correctly he has allotted to the individual character exactly as much scope for its own development as it was entitled to from its relation to the whole representation, and how animated is the correlation in which he has managed to place his dramatic personages, so that the one seems characterised in and with the other—how, also, he shows the greatest talent for minutely depicting the history of the soul, how accurately he comprehends all the stages of mental development, every fold of the heart, and how ably he can reveal the hidden sophisms and prevarications of the human conscience—by which a feeble sensation gradually gains ground, becomes an impulse, the impulse a desire, the desire a passion, and the scarce-born thought a resolve, the resolve an action—how, in one case, ordinary conditions of the mind receive, at his hands, a higher significance, and in another, he describes, with the same vividness and truth, not only those rarer psychical phenomena such as melancholy and madness, but also the world of spirits, fairies and witches (those marvellous productions of the imagination which stand midway between man and demon), in order, as it were, to throw light upon human nature, from another region and from an eccentric point of view.

Sometimes, however, Shakspeare does not describe his characters with sufficient clearness and distinctness, at least for the ordinary reader and spectator; he not unfrequently omits to state definitely and explicitly the internal reasons and motives for the resolves, behaviour, doings and sufferings of his dramatic characters (for instance, for Hamlet's conduct, for Ophelia's madness, Lady Macbeth's disturbed state of mind, etc.). By this I do not mean to say that, in all cases of this kind, the events are actually unmotivated, that they cannot be explained from the character of the persons and the given circumstances: on the contrary, I am convinced that this can be done. But Shakspeare does not state the motives, he leaves the spectator to discover them from interspersed hints and indications, sometimes even but from the connection of the whole. Absorbed in the endeavour to give every

separate scene an effective dramatic character, to fill every situation with dramatic interest, and everywhere to raise the sympathy of the spectator to the highest possible pitch; and filled with anxiety to check the course of the action and to weaken the dramatic interest by an explicit description of all those often hidden and scarcely conscious emotions of the soul, which are the original sources of the conditions of our mind and the motives of our actions—he (in most cases certainly, on purpose, sometimes, perhaps, involuntarily) omits to refer the spectator expressly to these first causes and the connection of the action which they determine. I grant that he not unfrequently goes too far in this endeavour; occasionally, at all events, the uncertainty about the actual motives, and hence about the inner mental life, about the nature and character of his dramatic personages, appears so great, that it cannot be entirely removed, and that the connection of the actions and events suffers in consequence—which is always a fault in dramatic composition. And yet the fault is, in reality, caused only by an essential merit, just as a shadow is produced by the nature of light—the great merit which accounts for the fact that Shakspeare's principal masterpieces (after a period of more than 300 years) still fill the theatre, still carry the interest in the representation to the highest pitch, and still exercise a power over the spectator, the effect of which cannot be compared with that of scarcely any other drama.

At all events it is a great merit in Shakspeare's dramas that, not only the heroes and the persons engaged in the support of the action, but that every one of the secondary characters down to the mere pages, men-servants, and maid-servants, etc., are living individuals, often drawn with but a few strokes, yet always definitely characterised figures, which not only fill their own place, but are also invariably in their right place. This equally vivid as correctly described gradation of the characters in their various relations to one another—according to which the delineation and modelling of every figure appears to be carried out exactly so far, and occupies exactly as much space as is required by its position to the whole of the action—this truly dramatic and historical mode of characterisation the poet can, how-

ever, succeed in accomplishing only when he possesses the knowledge of how to place all the dramatic characters in a definite relation to one internal centre, upon which the whole action turns, and which thus renders it possible to assign to every figure a definite place and scope for action, according to its closer or more remote relation to this centre. The centre thus becomes the standard not only for the significance, but also for the life and destinies of the dramatic personages; each, in the position it occupies by virtue of its *character*, at the same time bears its own *fate* within itself, exactly as in real life a man's good or ill-luck appears dependent upon his self-chosen position as regards the centre and aim of history.

These remarks naturally lead to the question as to what principle Shakspeare followed in the *composition* of his dramas. The old senseless reproach, which accuses Shakspeare of being an irregular genius who blindly pursued his course, and unconsciously abandoned himself to his fancies without plan or aim, and who therefore produced some excellent passages, but was incapable of presenting a finished artistic whole, does not, perhaps, in our day, require any refutation; this, however, can be given only in a detailed criticism of his individual works. He who acknowledges Shakspeare's genius, and yet denies him the gift of artistic composition, contradicts himself; for it is in fact the cosmical, the natural and the absolute necessity of his creations that are the first and surest criteria of genius. Genius, this higher mind which inherits by nature the dominion over powers and forms in any one domain of life, must surely most distinctly and plentifully bear within itself the essence and the essential properties of the mind. But mind is mind only, is free and conscious only, by its *dominion* over itself and its inner life, thereby alone is it able to acquire and maintain the dominion over the outer life. Dominion without order, without methodical, definite unity of thought and will, is a chimera. Hence it cannot exist without the power of morality, and it must itself be the outcome of moral greatness. An immoral genius is no genius; the addition of this element unavoidably causes genius to degenerate into mere talent, as is proved in the case of Lord Byron and many poets and

artists of ancient and modern times. He who cannot control himself, cannot control others, and least of all can he control art and science. Shakspeare's moral greatness, accordingly, was unquestionably one of the main levers of his genius.

The above reproach, which has more especially originated from some misunderstood expressions of Plato (which maintain that a poet in his inspiration possesses neither thought nor consciousness, and is only an organ in the hands of a higher power, etc.) is, however, one of those many errors which, like some diseases, are propagated from generation to generation. Plato only meant to say that a poet does not work and create with any definite intention, previously determined, nor in pondering and reflecting, wavering here and there, but from a deep inward necessity apart from consciousness; in this he is perfectly right. For it is a fact founded upon observation, that, while the artist is at work, thought and will, although profound, clear, and well-regulated, are so wholly intent upon creating and forming that the mind is incapable of distinguishing itself from its own activity, and therefore cannot reflect upon its work. The inseparable internal community between the poet and his poem at the moment of its creation—the predominance of imagination and the feeling of beauty by which he is involuntarily led, and by means of which he everywhere directly comprehends the separate in the whole and conversely—does not permit his full, clear consciousness concerning the centre and connection of the whole, and also concerning the ideas and motives upon which it is founded, becoming manifest. It may, therefore, easily happen that the poet himself, *after* the completion of his work, cannot give any account of it. The language of the artist is poetry, music, drawing, and colouring; there is no other form in which he can express himself with equal depth and clearness. Who would ask a philosopher to paint his ideas in colours? It would be equally absurd to think that because a poet cannot say with perfect philosophical certainty, in the form of reflection and of pure thought, what it was that he wished and intended to produce, that therefore he never thought at all, but that he let his imagination improvise at random. Ideas can, in fact,

be expressed in very different forms, and yet in reality remain the same. When, therefore, that which the artist has expressed in verse, tones, or colours, is explained by the æsthetic critic in his language of analytical, separating and connecting reflection, which lays bare the inmost kernel, he is doing only what he is bound to do, and what is his vocation. He does precisely what a musician does when setting one of Goethe's poems to music, or what a painter does when making illustrations to Shakspeare's dramas; the æsthetic critic is but another form of illustration, and the poem which does not require or cannot brook an illustration cannot, assuredly, be reckoned among the masterpieces of poetry.

That Shakspeare had reflected, and reflected deeply upon all kinds of matters in nature, history, religion, art, and philosophy, but more especially upon the ethical principles of human life, must be granted even by the most inveterate opponents of æsthetic ideas, because every scene brings up before their eyes the most brilliant, the grandest and finest thoughts. It is only as regards the composition, design and development of his pieces that he is supposed to have had no thought, and to have been utterly unconscious in his work. If, however, in a work of art we look only for the logical connection, the prosaic advance from cause to effect, or even only for the motive power of a machine where, with clattering necessity every wheel fits into wheel, and cog into cog, according to mathematical calculation, then indeed, neither in Shakspeare nor in the best Greek tragedies—in spite of their being universally acknowledged as models—shall we be able to find plan and order; the most splendid choruses of Sophocles would have to be thrown aside as useless lumber. And yet artistic, and more especially dramatic, composition is no logical or mechanical contrivance, it is a living organism full of soul and mind. As its object is to represent the substance and form of the world's history, so its archetype is the eternal order and living development of history. And, as in history a multiplicity of independent individuals, who apparently meet accidentally, are formed into a many-membered whole, and move on towards one goal, so in the drama every figure ought to maintain its own free ground, and yet all

ought to group themselves round one centre and to co-operate for one end. Without such an organic centre, from which all the radii proceed, it is simply impossible to have order, design, and harmony, which are the fundamental conditions of all beauty; to deny the existence of such a centre in a composition, to deny it that internal unity which alone combines the different parts into one whole, is the same thing as to deny that there is any art in the work of art. It is only by the dramatic characters placing themselves in many different relations to this centre, each according to its individuality, that every figure receives its definite place in the whole; it is only by their moving round this centre of the action in many different directions, and striving in different ways to approach the object of the movement which it determines, that makes the progress of the action an actual advance. Without an internal centre of this kind, it would be impossible to have any definite unity in the dramatic characters among one another, or any firm connection in the actions and destinies; without it every drama resolves itself into an accidental meeting, coming and going of individual figures, and the whole must inevitably fall to pieces.

If Shakspeare is a dramatic poet of the first rank, as even his censors admit, the question is not whether he aimed at this internal unity in his dramatic poems, but merely whether he attained that which he aimed at, and what path he struck in order to reach the goal, *i.e.*, what was his conception of that inner centre, and did he succeed in placing all the parts of the whole in a clear and living relation to it. The so-called Aristotelian unities of action, of place and time, are not sufficient even if they could be adhered to without unreasonably limiting and weakening the substance and effect of dramatic poetry. For even if the action were of the greatest possible simplicity, and were completed in one definite place and within a short and readily surveyable space of time, still it would always consist of a number of points of time (scenes), would always involve the co operation of different persons and be subject to the interference of manifold conflicting aims and motives. What is the bond that knits the many into one, and makes the various incidents, the multiplicity

of characters, as well as the successive scenes, appear as members of one whole? It is evident that the *external* finish, the clear, intelligible arrangement, and the harmonious make-up of the separate scenes, or in other words, that that which may be called the beauty of the *external* composition, is to be attained only by the poet, from the very beginning, keeping the central turning-point of the action steadily in view, never losing sight of the principle that every scene should lead with measured step towards a definite goal, and, like a skilful weaver, by combining the separate threads in such a manner that, without becoming entangled, they clearly and distinctly exhibit a well defined design.

That Shakspeare was a master in composition, in this sense of the word, is universally acknowledged. His skill as regards the external arrangement and make-up of the material appears the more wonderful, the greater the number of the characters, and the quantity of actions and events with which most of his dramas are furnished. He *requires* this abundance of material because, as already said; it is his object that no moment of the representation shall appear devoid of action, but, rather, wherever it is possible, that every scene shall carry the interest in the action to a higher pitch, and because, on the other hand, he individualises his heroes so sharply that they are no mere ideal forms, no mere representatives of humanity, but, in themselves represent directly only their own selves in their personal peculiarity. For if the drama is 'to hold up a mirror to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image and the very age and body of time his form and pressure,' then the subject must possess *general* application and significance. The fate of the hero must not appear *only* the consequence of his particular nature, of his individual character, of his circumstances and surroundings, but must at the same time be a warning to all those who find themselves in a similar position. A general significance such as this, the subject can, however, acquire only when it applies equally to the greatest possible variety of characters, deeds and destinies. And still Shakspeare's dramas distinctly show the necessary subdivision of the substance into three parts—exposition, the travelling and

the unravelling of the plot (the catastrophe). Ever invariably appears a well considered step towards a definite goal; the path to the goal, however, resembles at one time more of a straight line, at another, more of an intricate curve—according to the nature of the subject—but it always keeps to the prescribed direction, without gaps or interruptions.

But this intrinsic connection and steady advance can be accomplished only when, as already said, the many separate threads of the web are woven in such a manner that they present a well defined design in cognisable features. The *inner* composition of the drama has, therefore, to be well distinguished from the external arrangement and make-up of the material. It applies to the manner in which the poet brings into view the intellectual and ethical character of his poem, or the general significance of the action represented. That it was Shakspeare's *intention* and *endeavour*, in his dramas, to embody an ideal character of this kind, which comprehended something beyond the special, cannot be doubted when we consider the task which he expressly imposed upon dramatic art. For when he says that his object is 'to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure,' by this he declares it to be his intention not only to describe all sorts of men, all sorts of characters, in all sorts of situations, but at the same time to exhibit the nature of virtue and of vice, the spirit of the times, the character of the age, accordingly, to mirror that which is general in the special. But the spirit of the age, 'the form and pressure' of the century, can obviously be represented only if the poet possesses a definite conception as to the nature and object of human life, which he can make the foundation of his representation. And this general view of the world can be applied dramatically, and the spirit and character of the age determined by it and reflected in its special nature only when resolved into its elements, not in its totality and universality, but represented in the various forms which it assumes under the different prevailing conditions and given circumstances, in other words, when every separate drama is founded upon a view of life conceived

from a definite stand-point, and thus so definitely circumscribed that the whole representation is based upon this view, that the characters are reflected and formed in accordance with it, and that the progress of the action is defined and its object determined by it; in short, that it appears the central point upon which the whole turns and is reflected in the course of the action, in the characters, deeds and fortunes of the dramatic personages. This peculiar *view* of life which reveals itself in the formation of the whole, like the soul in the formation of the body, may be called the *fundamental idea* of the dramatic work of art. It is, so to say, the red thread which runs through all the parts of the texture in the design, the internal bond which connects and holds together all the separate parts, the principle which determines the whole in form and substance.

That Shakspeare had the *intention* of founding his dramas upon ideas in this sense, is evident, in my opinion, from his own definition of the drama, and consequently we are not only justified, but from an æsthetical point of view, it is our duty to find out the leading ideas of his compositions. It may, however, still be asked whether Shakspeare everywhere realised his intention, whether he was everywhere successful in bringing his ideas into so clear a light that no doubt can be entertained about them or their subject. As a rule the idea acquires a more definite form, in the poet's consciousness, only while he is working out his subject, which he at first selects instinctively simply, on account of its general, dramatico-poetical character. But besides this, the idea, as described above, when conceived as a concrete-general view of life, possesses so much breadth that it can be carried out in different ways, by different characters, actions and situations. And lastly, the dramatic idea *must* not be treated like a mould into which everything can be well or ill arranged; the dramatic action and its course must rather invariably appear the result of the free movement of the dramatic personages, the self-development of their characters and relations, otherwise the action degenerates into a mere event. The idea therefore must not disturb this free movement, must not exercise any constraint upon it, but must, of its own accord, appear to

proceed accidentally out of the course of the action. Thus it must never obtrude itself and never be expressed or definitely marked, for if this were done the poet himself would come too much into the foreground, his intention would be observed and in place of a 'pressure' of the body of time, we should only have the 'pressure' of the poet's subjective intention and views. The idea, therefore, must run through the different parts only like a hidden, invisible thread, it must only, as it were, form the atmosphere in which everything breathes, the nature of which indeed determines the whole appearance of light and shade, colour and drawing of the picture, but which is itself invisible and never makes a prominent appearance. Inasmuch as Shakspeare has treated the fundamental idea in this truly dramatic sense, it cannot excite surprise that there is a continual dispute among commentators and æsthetic critics, as to whether there can be any question about fundamental ideas and what the ideas are upon which his different characters are founded.

In my opinion it is evident, at all events, that if the English drama did not wish to quit the firm ground of *historical* life, and resolved to retain its peculiarly rich variety of *individual* characters and actions, then, as I think, the method of composition which Shakspeare principally followed was the only means of giving the representation a general significance, and of raising the individual characters and actions above common reality into the domain of poetry. For the special action does not of itself possess any general significance, and the special individual character can but represent the ideal indirectly, partially and one-sidedly. If, on the other hand, the fundamental idea of the drama is but truly poetical, and if the individual characters appear only as the *bearers* of this idea, and their actions and fortunes are only the *outcome* of its development and realization, then by this means alone they are raised into the sphere of ideality—the historical reality becomes the expression of an ideal world, in which every special thing, on its own part, represents the ideal, and acquires the form of beauty. Shakspeare's greatest merit, in my opinion, consists in his

having found this artistic form, which is alone appropriate to the modern drama, and of having in his best works given us adequate models of this form. In doing this he has not only—as far as composition is concerned—solved the great problem which the condition of dramatic art set before the poets of his time and nation, but he has thereby first *established* the modern drama which—as opposed to the enthusiasm for classic antiquity and the formal completion of the antique drama—could only be preserved and further developed in its own peculiarity, if it succeeded in obtaining a form in no way inferior to the antique in beauty and design.

Lastly, that which is usually called *invention*, in Shakspeare again corresponds perfectly with his mode of characterisation and composition. This term—apart from the question as to whether the subject is the poet's own property or borrowed—is generally understood to apply only to the position and the course, the complication and the development of the *external* human relations and circumstances, events and fortunes, hence to that which may be distinguished from the characters and their inner life, from the composition and fundamental idea of the drama as the purely historical fact or narrative. The fundamental idea is, so to say, the soul, the invention is the body of the work of art. Its real nature, therefore, is to give shape to the various relations subsisting between the character of the dramatic personages and the outer world. For instance, when Hamlet is taken prisoner in the fight with the pirates, when Romeo does not receive Friar Laurence's letter, when Antonio's ships are actually, or supposed to have been lost, these are events of the outer world, which, although independent of the characters, nevertheless influence their lives; it is in such matters that invention (in the narrower sense of the word) is chiefly expressed. Accordingly, if we enquire into its *nature*, and into the poet's peculiarity which is expressed in it, the most important question evidently is: In what manner has the poet conceived the relation of the outer world to the character, to the resolves and actions of his dramatic personages?

In regard to this point Shakspeare has recently been reproached for having had 'very imperfect ideas of the

strict causal concatenation of the course of things, and of the real dependence of all human action, that consequently, the dramatic action, in almost all of his works, suffers from great improbabilities, nay, inconceivabilities' (Rümelin). Now, it is true that Shakspeare in general—apart, however, from his comedies—'makes the action proceed out of the characters to a far greater extent than experience shows,' that with him the weakening counterpoise lying in the concatenation of external relations and circumstances, falls less heavily in the scales, that he 'gives man too independent and unrestricted a scope for action, and that his characters stand out too freely and independently from the social and historical background,' in short, that his heroes more or less surpass the human standard in greatness of character, energy of will, activity, and violence of passions. But the so-called 'course of things,' that is, history and its pragmatistical continuity, rests primarily after all only on human nature itself, which, in reality, is the same everywhere, and the different characters reveal the wealth of its elements only in various combinations; and Shakspeare's profound, comprehensive knowledge of man no critic has ever disputed. But just because he understood human nature so well, he also knew that a mere copy of common reality—the limitation of the ordinary standard of human power, the continual reference to the invariable dependence of human actions and sufferings on external circumstances—by no means corresponds with the *poetical* instincts and requirements of human nature. The common 'course of things,' with its hindering depressing influence, is thoroughly prosaic, just as prosaic as the common citizen of the world, who tries to adapt the small power he possesses to the 'course of things,' and to profit by it. This was why even Aristotle demanded of the tragic poet to depict an ambitious, powerful and great character (σπουδαῖος) ambitious enough to engage in a conflict with 'the course of things,' and powerful enough, even when conquered, to show his power and greatness, his freedom and independence. For it is not weakness, but strength, not dependence, but freedom, not the common, but the uncommon, that is poetical; this pleasure which man finds in what is great, powerful and extra-

ordinary, this attractive power of the ideal in human nature may indeed sink for a time and may give way to the pressing interests of practical life, but can never be wholly extinguished. Hence that which we call tragic, is not the feeble cringing and submission to the power of circumstances, not the rule of an invincible and blindly acting fate, but only the fall of what is great, noble and beautiful, as the result of its own frailty and only that which excites a feeling of fear and of pity, of purification and elevation. Hence in tragedy, the action must not only appear conditioned and determined by the characters in a higher degree than experience shows, but in accordance with the great heroic forms from which it proceeds, ought to surpass the standard of ordinary life. This by no means causes it to become improbable or inconceivable. That alone is inconceivable which contradicts itself, the improbable is not that which lacks truth, but that which lacks the appearance of truth. But appearance deceives, and truth, accordingly, is by no means always probable either. An action, therefore, which is supported by great, heroic and uncommon characters, but nevertheless moves wholly within the routine of every-day experience, would appear improbable, on account of the inherent contradiction.

It has been urged, however, that such extraordinary characters and actions are, at best, admissible only in a perfectly free poem which chooses and forms its subject at will; that in historical dramas—which deserve this name only if they essentially and faithfully reflect historical truth—it is not admissible to go beyond the empirical standard of the power and independence of man. Accordingly, it has been said that Shakspeare's want of knowledge concerning 'the course of things' and of the many conditions determining the human will and action, is here especially striking, inasmuch as he invariably 'accepts events as something already simply given by chronicles. and that there is never any question as to the power and effect of definite social conditions.' This objection I must again reject, at least in the general sense in which it is expressed. I think that, if Shakspeare, as is universally acknowledged, has in most cases succeeded—although he has accepted events as simply 'given by chronicles'

—in combining, animating and filling up the historical subject in such a manner that the picture at the same time produces a powerful poetical impression, this is only a proof of his extraordinary gift for dramatic art; for this is, of course, more readily attained when the subject is freely chosen and altered at will. General social conditions, however, the poet cannot describe like an historian by giving an accurate account of the prevailing and general geographical, climatic and historical relations, by explaining their causes and effects, and by comparing them with other nations and times, he can represent them only by situations, the dispositions and characters of the various dramatic personages. And this Shakspeare has generally done: in 'King John,' for instance, by describing the behaviour of the citizens of Calais, by the prominent features in the general disposition of the English and French nobility, by his manner of characterising the principal figures; in 'Richard III.' by the description of Bolingbroke's entry into London, and other smaller features; in 'Henry IV.' by the fictitious character of Falstaff, which is interwoven with the historical events in so masterly a manner; in 'Henry V.' by the introduction of the camp-scene, and some figures from common life, such as the page, Gower, Fluellen, etc. This alone may be admitted, that Shakspeare, in regard to the derivation and the development of the motives of the historical events, does not place any great stress either upon general social conditions or upon the peculiarities and specific differences of nations and times. That which is common to all men is everywhere prominent in his dramas in the garb of the English nation of the sixteenth century; the features of the special, the peculiar, and the specific, appear only as variations of the one great expressive melody which resounds through all his poems. But it is nevertheless very doubtful whether a poet might go further in this respect than Shakspeare went. It is also doubtful whether, in the times which Shakspeare describes (more particularly his dramas of the English kings, to which the reproach especially refers) general circumstances and social conditions, in fact, whether people and citizens exercised so important an influence upon the origin and course of

events that, even from a purely historical point of view, they deserved a more careful consideration. Lastly, it is also very doubtful whether modern historiography is right when, owing to its realistic tendency, it not only regards individual periods, but invariably considers general conditions to be the fundamental source of historical events, and therefore gives necessity the precedence over freedom. If Shakspeare is of the opposite opinion and indulges in an 'aristocratic conception of the world,' then—from the stand-point of poetry at any rate, and perhaps at least from that of history—he is perfectly right in deriving the historical deeds not indeed exclusively, but pre-eminently from the characters and the free resolves of princes and the leaders of the people. Accordingly I can admit only this much—that Shakspeare in his historical pieces, owing to the more complicated material, has more frequently than usual neglected, clearly and distinctly to explain to the spectator, the motives of the action and the internal connection of its incidents, and that, in order to obtain dramatic effect from the demure subject, he occasionally brings the situation to the extreme point of the abruptest contrast, and thereby offends probability—as for instance, in the scene where Richard III. sues for the hand of the Princess Anne, or in the description of Timon's actions.

However, if such single mistakes are supposed to prove that the author of 'Macbeth' and 'Othello,' of the 'Henrys' and 'Richards,' of 'Coriolanus' and 'Julius Cæsar' has "*never* very clearly understood that action and characterisation stand in the closest relation one to another, that the tragic effect rests essentially upon their agreement, and consequently that a subject cannot be taken from *any* anecdote, chronicle, or novel, and decorated with mind, wit, profound wisdom, brilliant images and thoughts, as a Christmas tree is hung with lights," I now and for ever maintain, in opposition to this verdict of critical delusion, that, not only does Shakspeare's mode of characterisation and composition, but in general his invention also, correspond perfectly with historical reality. As, in life and history, it is external relations, unforeseen circumstances, unexpected events and actions,—that which in a wider sense we call *chance*, which exercise more or less in-

fluence over the aims, actions, and fortunes of men, so in Shakspeare also, the course of the dramatic action is never *only* dependent upon the individuality of the various characters; in him both co-operate everywhere to form the real substance of the representation. But how far the one or the other side has to assert itself, how far the given position of things ought to express its influence upon the character, the doings and sufferings of the dramatic personages, must, in single cases, be determined by the nature of the chief characters, more especially, however, by the fundamental idea of the piece. In Shakspeare's comedies it is usually the outer world, in his tragedies the character and personality, that have the greater influence in the motives and development of the action, and thus accord with his idea of comedy and tragedy. His invention naturally modifies itself in conformity with this conception; with him it is but seldom simple (as in 'Timon of Athens,' and in some of his comedies, for instance, in 'As You Like It,' 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'Love's Labour Lost,' and in several of his historical dramas—'Coriolanus,' 'Henry V.,' 'Richard III.'). in general it may be called complicated. He stands in need, as already said, of a certain mass of facts, because his mode of characterisation and composition demand different groups of dramatic personages, all of whom, as they influence one another, require their separate story. Taking the *single* groups by themselves, it may be said that the invention is *invariably* simple, and without any great weight, for it is only through combining the groups into one whole that it becomes complicated. Shakspeare, however, never seems to have set much value in weaving the threads into an especially difficult or interesting complication; for with him the fact and the outward position of things meet in the centre of the whole, and influence the character and inner life of the dramatic personages; consequently, the complication is always the result of the co-operation of both which mutually limit and determine each other. That which happens, as well as the relations and circumstances under which it happens, is in Shakspeare frequently indeed (in most of his tragedies) unusual and extraordinary, but as frequently (in many of his

comedies) very common and ordinary. In this respect the principle of the greatest possible variety predominates in him as in life and history. -

It is this mutual interaction of the different groups and their history which alone reveals Shakspeare's great inventive power. It is one of his peculiarities that he has in all cases *borrowed* the actual substance of the action, or, to use a more common expression, the *subjects* for his plays have been taken from foreign sources, from older dramas, novels and tales, chronicles and histories, and that in most cases he has closely followed his authorities. Hebler says, 'it invariably seems less Shakspeare's intention to introduce something of his own into his subject, than to bring into the fullest light that which he found it to contain—in other words, to give the subject the greatest possible stage effect from the point of view which most interested him, and from which it presented itself to his mind. The public for whom he wrote demanded of its dramatists not that they should invent, or that the subject should be treated in any quite peculiar manner, but that the well-known, favourite, and often strange subjects should be very vividly brought before them. Shakspeare adapted himself to this taste, or, to speak more correctly, his pleasure in the subject (in the action and the sequence of events, that is, in the specifico-dramatic elements of the representation) was the stimulating motive of his artistic activity in a far greater degree than was the case with either Goethe or Schiller.' Shakspeare's own activity expresses itself in most cases only in a more or less extensive alteration, usually only in the further development of the material and the giving it a deeper spiritual significance; but more particularly in the combining of the several stories or events into one complete whole, to which allusion has already been made. If this were supposed to contain a proof of a want of inventive power, we should be overlooking the fact that no poet creates his subject purely out of nothing, but that he invariably only represents, that is, gives a poetic form to the life and nature of man as it exists; hence he works upon some given subject, and consequently the basis of every genuine work of art can only be the profound true understanding of the

materials furnished by life and history. That, however, Shakspeare almost always elevated the figures he found in the sources from which he drew, into complete and genuine poetic characters, that he first breathed spirit and life into them, and that he was invariably the first to endow the given material with a higher and general significance, is evident from the most superficial comparison of his plays with their originals. Moreover, the fact that he was in all cases able to accomplish this, is, in my opinion, a proof of greater force and intensity of genius, greater truth and depth of intellect, than if he had himself invented the subject-matter of his dramas. If, therefore, in our idea of invention we include this, the most essential point, the real substance of all art and poetry—the conception of the characters and leading ideas (and this involves every part of the dramatic work of art, characterisation, composition, language, the subject and course of the action)—we shall have to place Shakspeare's genius very high, perhaps higher in inventive power than that of any other poet. In none do we find such a variety of different characters, in none such a profusion of ideas; this, I assert here on the sole authority of Goethe.*

* See *Goethe's Werke*, vol. 45.

CHAPTER VII.

SHAKSPEARE'S POETICAL CONCEPTION OF LIFE.

THE means by which Shakspeare solved the given problem in dramatic art, that is to say, his mode of composition and characterisation, as well as his treatment of language, and which in their peculiarity and harmonious combination constitute his dramatic style,—although the direct expressions of his idea of dramatic art—are nevertheless in reality only forms, the substance of which consists in his poetical conception of human life, and is therefore essentially determined by it. This conception in its general nature agrees with the Christian view of life, as must be evident from a clear and unprejudiced glance at his works. By this, however, we do not mean to say that the Christian dogma in its ecclesiastico-theological conception invariably controls and pervades his works—it is only the general principles in their contrast to pantheism and fatalism, materialism and naturalism, only the leading ideas, and these only in their poetical character, that are essentially the same. It is only within the Christian view of life that the free will of man, and with it the proposition: disposition and destiny are synonymous ideas—have their full significance. According to the ancient idea, destiny, although borne, developed and carried out by the will and actions of men, stands nevertheless in direct opposition to their freedom of will as an unalterable necessity; for, like *Cædipus*, just as he was on the point of fleeing from his destiny, of combating it, he fell a victim to its power. This necessity controls human existence in the form of the eternal laws of nature and ethics which, however, being without life or motion, fall into contradiction with one another in their various elements, and thus also bring human duties into contradiction (*Orestes*, *Antigone*, *Electra*); these duties stand opposed to human freedom

as an infinite will with finite power, and above which therefore man—in the independence and activity of his self-conscious will—feels himself exalted, whereas in the weakness and limitation of his power he succumbs to it (Prometheus, Ajax, Philoctetus, Deianira, Niobe, Medea, etc.). This was the reason why the ancient drama did not require the same fulness and accurate working out of individual characters, the same refraction of ideas, the same diversified elasticity of language. The contrasts were given to it originally, were thoroughly objective and distinctly defined; hence they could not and did not require to be exhibited in their evolution from the mind and its freedom, in their original unity, their divergence and ultimate reconciliation. When, in the ancient drama, a *dénouement* was required, it came in a purely external form, by the appearance of some god. We may say that the heroes of Greek tragedy represented the special subjective side of life and history, the gods, the general and the objective (order of the universe and moral law); both, from the very beginning of things have been at variance, and separated by a deep, dark chasm, which conceals the origin of evil and the beginning of sin; both, it is true, long and strive after internal, real union, but no actual reconciliation is effected, it remains a mere striving and struggling which can obtain peace only from without, by compromise and concessions from one or the other side. (Thus Orestes obtains peace, and Œdipus a blissful death only as a concession from the gods.)

In the Christian view of life, on the other hand, there is no over-ruling destiny; God, His love and justice, govern the world's history; He is a living, self-acting, free personality, and can therefore of His own accord limit Himself, can will the freedom of man, can enter into this freedom by granting the human mind—because it is and is to be mind—free causation and self-activity within the limit of its own nature, reserving for Himself alone the determination of that limit, the form of the outward circumstances and relations, as well as the consequences and effects of human actions, and by His guidance of the world's history, working from within towards the goal of human destiny. According to the Christian view, there-

fore, destiny is one and the same thing as action, and the substance of ideas which make up the world's history. Man is, in fact, master of his own destiny, and his destiny is nevertheless, at the same time, a divine dispensation. Universal, inviolable laws, which embrace nature and the world of man, also govern his existence, but this natural and moral necessity is subject to the free dispensation of the self-conscious God of love. An internal, organic unity and correlation has therefore to be represented; the course of the historical development is determined by general conditions and relations, by general moral and natural laws, but at the same time by the free will of man and the dispensation of God; the destinies of the dramatic personages must, therefore, be derived step by step from their own characters, their own self-determination and their own actions, but, at the same time, from the state of the historical life as a whole, and from the divine order and government of the world by which it is controlled. All the three causes which mutually determine and complete one another must, in their co-operation, be equally represented. Their want of agreement, which in the ancient drama is everywhere apparent and is solved only outwardly according to circumstances, is here solved internally, and must therefore also be represented as one which actually solves itself. The Christian God Himself wills the reconciliation of the contrasts which in the ancient view of the world are at strife with each other; the want of agreement, accordingly, can exist only in the nature of the *individuals* in their special conduct, aspirations, and endeavours; the solution can, therefore, result only from the co-operation of all these agents. This, however, necessarily demands that abundance of forms and relations, that accurate and detailed characterisation, those manifold reflexes of ideas, as well as that many-sidedness of the action and change of tone and language by which the modern drama, and more particularly Shakspeare's compositions, are distinguished.

I have already, in the preceding portion of this work, shown how these three agents—which, from the standpoint of the Christian view of life, form, as it were, the elements of a complete action—appeared one after the

other in the course of the development of the English drama, and ultimately took entire possession of the stage. The Mysteries regarded the action one-sidedly as a divine supernatural act, as a mere emanation of the divine government of the world; the Moralities represented it in an equally one-sided manner as simply the result of universally prevailing moral forces and laws; lastly, J. Heywood's Interludes conceived it with equal one-sidedness, as nothing more than the expression of the arbitrary conduct and aspirations of single individuals. The subsequent regular drama down to Greene and Marlowe tried in vain to blend these three elements into a truly organic whole; but they did not accomplish more than giving the elements an external connection. But Shakspeare—by pointing in a symbolical manner, in such pieces as 'Macbeth,' 'Hamlet,' 'Julius Cæsar,' 'Richard III.,' and 'Cymbeline,' to the interference of a higher divine power, invisible to the common eye (yet everywhere allowing the general moral powers to co-operate as personifications of the divine government of the world, not only internally but externally also by means of representatives of the state and law), and at the same time by always representing the action as the free act of the individual—as the outflow of the moral character and of the circumstances in the life of the individual,—was the first to bring about a truly organic union of the three agents. He thereby not only raised the original elements of the English drama to their right position in regard to one another, but also made dramatic poetry in general, the poetical reflex of the world's history. Thus, in this respect also, he forms the climax and turning point in the history of dramatic art.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHAKSPEARE'S IDEA OF TRAGEDY AND COMEDY.

SHAKSPEARE'S general view of human life is in accordance with his conception of the idea of tragedy and comedy; the latter confirms and explains the former, and *vice versa*. For if divine justice, in its oneness with moral necessity, is conceived as the guiding principle of history, then it follows as a matter of course that, not only the common, the low and the unworthy, but also that which is greatest, noblest and most beautiful in human life, must fall a victim to suffering, misery, and death as soon as it is at variance with the moral necessity. This at once shows the *tragic aspect* of Shakspeare's view of life. With him the tragic element consists invariably in the suffering and final ruin of what is great, noble, and beautiful in man, as a consequence of his own weakness, one-sidedness and want of character, into which its representatives—the heroes of tragedy—fall, either by seeking to obtain what is good and beautiful only in order to satisfy their passions (even though these be great and noble) and are thus enslaved and blinded inasmuch as these succumb to selfishness and want of freedom, or by one-sidedly placing their whole strength of will in some *special* possession, some *special* right, and inconsiderately neglecting everything else, thus defying the moral necessity which demands greater consideration for the whole of humanity than for the individual man. Shakspeare by this means shows us man in the light of the demand which necessarily lies within himself, endeavouring to act in conformity with his *own true* nature and thereby with the divine will, which only demands man's own activity towards the realization and completion of his nature. His conforming with the divine will is, in fact, moral necessity, and at the same time, his true freedom, inasmuch as, of course, his will

can be truly free only when in conformity with his true nature in accordance with it and when proceeding from it. If man acts contrary to this demand of his own nature, he enters into conflict with the inner moral necessity, externally in the form of destiny. His resolves and actions are thwarted and become his own ruin; his earthly existence comes to an end, because the *special* in itself cannot continue to exist when, in selfish obstinacy and in hostility, it opposes the order of the whole, or, because confounding what is external and necessary with what is temporary and accidental, he desires that which is transient. And as human greatness and beauty are never quite free from weakness and one-sidedness, as, in fact, human goodness is always but of a *limited, relative* value, and accordingly every moral law, every duty and every right has but a definite sphere of activity, it may thus happen that general moral forces themselves come into collision with one another; a collision of duties takes place, in which right is at the same time wrong, and good at the same time evil. Such a collision is pre-eminently tragic, because it allows the ruin of what is humanly good, by its own uncertainty to appear as the *general* destiny, not merely of the individual, but of all human relations and conditions. This higher form of tragedy, which is closely allied to the ancient idea and yet essentially different from it, is easily and freely entered into by Shakspeare's conception, without however actually requiring it to unfold the tragic pathos in its whole depth and weight.

If, on the other hand, divine love, and—in contrast to it—the motley play of human caprice, are conceived to be the leading principles of human life, then the representation must assume quite a different form and character. God's love comes to the assistance of human weakness and perversity; for where heart and mind are not depraved in themselves, not hardened with sin, but have, so to speak, only temporarily wandered from the right path, His love allows man's foolish, vain, and senseless resolves and actions to neutralise themselves in such a manner, that they are not succeeded by their natural consequences—misery and ruin—but that, in fact, the very thwarting of

these resolves and man's own destruction bring about that which is right and good. This effect corresponds completely with the nature of human caprice in its different forms of desire or fancy, emotions of the imagination or feelings, errors of the intellect or heart. Caprice necessarily manifests itself in acts of silliness and folly, in weakness and perversities of all kinds, because, being antagonistic to reason and moral necessity, in its activity, it assumes all the above forms. If caprice—which in itself is nothing but internal accident, and consequently, also invariably corresponds externally with the apparently accidental—is conceived as the ruling motive of human commissions and omissions, we have a world full of contradictions and absurdities without order and law; hence, a world for mere play, and itself but play and semblance. Such a world, however, cannot maintain itself, like every contradiction it must necessarily neutralise itself. As chance and caprice, weakness and perversity, error and folly paralyse each other, the result being that after all, that which is right and rational takes place and proves itself the truly permanent, so, there seems to be a higher necessity in the harmless play with human freedom (caprice); the mind appears in its disturbed state, in its defection from itself, but at the same time in its consciousness of self, in its return to itself (to what is good and true); these are the best of the current definitions of comedy, which, it is true, are still too vague and general (because, according to them, much would be comic which in reality is not comic), but they nevertheless apply to the most essential point of the idea. This, in fact, is the comic view of human life according to Shakspeare's idea; for in him the ridiculous depends, so to speak, upon the mind being tickled; it is invariably founded on a contradiction, which, however, must be æsthetical, a contradiction to the immediate feeling and perception. And as this belongs exclusively to the subjectivity of man, the ridiculous must also ever be dependent upon the character and the special situation, disposition and frame of mind of the individual. It is ridiculous to speak of a thing as actually ridiculous in itself. The ridiculous is, in all cases, ridiculous only by the way in which the object is conceived; there is

absolutely nothing that is generally ridiculous, no object which as *such* is purely ridiculous. But there certainly is a general comic *view* of life within which everything special *seems* ridiculous; in other words, the comic is an act of the mind, a manner of perception or form of conception, in which things present themselves to man. The comic in art, at least, is nothing but such a view and form of representing things; it does not only consist in single witticisms, jokes, situations and characters, but in the contradiction which runs through the whole representation, hiding itself in its subject, and intentionally set forth by it, but which is ultimately solved. The comic in art may therefore be termed the dialectics of irony, which do not look upon human life one-sidedly, as a world of contradictions and absurdities controlled by chance and caprice in all shapes, but which themselves sway and govern this world, and at the same time correct the one-sidedness of the conception by allowing chance and caprice—and consequently the world which is ruled by them—to neutralise themselves (dialectically), and to be converted into their opposites.* These dialectics not only govern the course of the action, but are also reflected in that peculiar shape of jest and wit, which in Shakspeare prefers to express itself in the form of puns. Puns intentionally and unintentionally turn words into their opposites, sense into nonsense, wit into absurdity, seriousness into jest, and conversely. Puns are therefore the dialectics of irony in the form of a linguistic expression, which manifest themselves in the form of a mutual paralysis of the intentions and endeavours of the dramatic personages. This internal harmony between diction and action, form and substance, makes the fault which Shakspeare falls into more endurable; he frequently heaps up and spins out mere puns to an immoderate extent.

This treatment and conception of the comic produces of itself a thoughtful joyousness which is spread over the whole representation. We find our own life, all our human weaknesses and perversities reflected in the world represented. But this cannot occasion any pain, for we are everywhere aware of the ruling power of the comic,

* Compare M. Carrière, 'Æsthetics,' i. 183 ff.

which causes all perplexities of the heart and mind, all the accidents to which our life is exposed, to become mutually paralysed, and it whispers to us the consoling thought that what is good and right happens in our world, not merely as a result of our own trouble and labour, but even contrary to our will. But, on the one hand, follies and perversities which neutralise each other (in fact by neutralising each other) bring into view the imperishable *nobility* of human nature concealed in them, that is, the innate divine stamp of our being, even though only indirectly, as the secret motive power of these dialectics; on the other hand, all human existence, the high as well as the low, the important as well as the unimportant, fall under the one general comic view of life, in which everything becomes a trifling matter, and the more trifling it appears, the more it arouses the free immortal mind of man, the feeling of his superiority above the world of appearances; it is this that produces that genial exuberance of spirits, that *Vive la bagatelle*, which in Shakspeare's best comedies is the soul of the representation.

But this joyousness is true joyousness, only because it at the same time contains a deep earnestness. For the comic side of the Shakspearian view of life is not confined to exhibiting *mere* human caprice, any more than his tragic view is limited to setting forth *merely* the moral necessity. In the latter suffering and death follow the violation of the moral law, not that man shall thereby be ruined, but that he may truly live; in other words, that he may rise purified out of the conflict into which he has fallen, out of the one-sidedness and delusion of passion, up to that which alone is true life in harmony with itself, and being thus in harmony with ethical necessity obtains true freedom and contentment. Thus, out of tragic pathos, out of the disturbed world of moral necessity as well as out of the comic paralysis, out of the impossible world of caprice and chance, there arises the true world of freedom, the eternal home of the spirit. This is the *conciliatory, comforting, elevating* element which is clearly and distinctly apparent in Shakspeare's better tragedies. And in the *comic* view of life also, it is not

exclusively caprice and chance that rule, life is also governed by moral necessity, the power of what is right and good; it is this moral power which, by its hidden counterplay, baffles the perverse resolves and actions of men and turns them into their opposites. Shakspeare, at times, brings this counterplay clearly and openly into the foreground, especially in cases where the question is not merely about the getting rid of folly and weakness, but about the struggle against evil and vice. In such cases the comic is sometimes mixed with a high earnestness which borders upon the tragic (for instance in 'Much Ado About Nothing' and in 'The Merchant of Venice,' etc.).

Tragedy and comedy in Shakspeare, therefore, are merely two different *forms* of art with the same substance, merely the two sides of his poetical view of human life. They can, accordingly, pass over directly one into the other, and meet without constraint in the same drama. And yet Shakspeare has always (and again quite recently) been reproached for not having kept tragedy and comedy strictly apart from each other, and more especially for having introduced scenes of low comedy into his overpowering tragedies. Those who deny that Shakspeare possessed a poetical view of life and æsthetic principles, and who, in fact, adhere to the opinion that he was wanting in fine æsthetic feeling, must be reminded that the combination of the two elements is not a special peculiarity of Shakspeare's; but was the general and characteristic feature of the English drama of the day. But in addition I appeal to the result, to the impression produced by the comic parts in his tragedies. Do they really injure the tragic effect? Do they really produce a disturbing impression upon the unprejudiced spectator? I believe the great majority of spectators will answer in the negative. It certainly depends upon the manner in which the comic is treated; it is not every species that can be linked to tragedy. But there is a form—and it is pre-eminently the form of the comic peculiar to Shakspeare—which, in the above described sense, conceals a deep ethical earnestness, under the disguise of "jest," and is thereby raised above the comic. This form has been called *humour*. Humour, in the narrower sense of the word, rests upon a

double basis, upon an idealism of the judgment and of the mind—which judges all human affairs by the highest ideal, uses it as a standard for measuring and comparing, and accordingly sees them only in their smallness, impropriety and perversity; but humour also rests upon a realism of the heart, of a warm heart full of feeling, to which love and devotion are a necessity, and which accordingly encourages and values all human affairs, chiefly those that are small, weak, and in want of help. Midway between these sharp contrasts, sometimes inclining more towards the one, sometimes more towards the other, is *wit*, acting in concert with a rich imagination, and playing from one to the other in such a manner that both are placed in the closest connection, penetrating each other and passing over one into the other. Humour, naturally, draws into its play more particularly the things and persons in its immediate surroundings. The Duke of Kent and the fool in 'King Lear,' Mercutio in 'Romeo and Juliet,' Faulconbridge in 'King John,' Hamlet, Henry V., as prince and king, are humorous figures in this sense; even the grave-diggers in 'Hamlet,' the porter in 'Macbeth,' possess something of this humour, which does not disturb, but raises and increases the effect of the tragic element. And yet in most cases, it is Shakspeare's custom to make the representatives of the people—tradesmen, soldiers, sailors, servants, etc., whom he introduces into his tragedies and historical dramas—the sustainers of the comic parts, which then do not by any means always possess the changing colours of humour. In this, he may only have yielded to the custom of the English theatre and to the desire of the great public who invariably liked to have something to laugh at. In my opinion, these scenes do not disturb the effect of the tragic element. The contrast exhibited in the people—by the happy limitation of their desires and thoughts, by their careless indifference concerning everything that does not directly touch upon the wants of practical life, by the fresh rough realism which characterises popular wit—as compared with the tragic heroes with their grand ideas and ideal strivings, their mighty emotions and passions (the source of their sorrows and sufferings) rather enhances the effect of the tragic element,

which, of course, is not merely intended to express itself in wild emotion, in a comfortless and hopeless despondency of the soul. Tragic pathos, on the other hand, the more it appears in the overwhelming force, such as we meet with in Shakspeare, where it rather threatens to destroy the soul in place of elevating it, the more it requires a soothing counterpoise in order to produce its full effect.*

Comedy in Shakspeare, it is true, not unfrequently rises to a higher region, as it is nowhere entirely separated from the ethical principle of human existence, which alone contains the root of all the earnestness of life; but in most cases, both in him and in all the more recent dramatists, it represents ordinary, every-day life which, in so far as it turns upon the personal interests of individuals, and proceeds without any direct relation to the general course of human affairs, must be regarded as unhistorical. The old political Comedy of the Greeks, with its constant references to public life, which was its very soul, is foreign to modern dramatic poetry. In accordance with the ancient view of life, that which was historically important was connected with external phenomena, with the force of the action and the power of its consequences. In antiquity it was only general, *i.e.*, public life that was historical, because private life had no independence, and was entirely absorbed by the state. Ancient comedy could, therefore, derive its general, ideal significance only from public life; when this was no longer possible, when it likewise had to turn its attention to the representation of private life, it rapidly sank into insignificance; a tragedy in *citizen life* was to the ancients an absurdity. However, in the modern, and more particularly in Shakspeare's view of life, every *idea*, as such, also possesses *historical* power and significance, whether, in the first place, it be evolved from public or from private life; the former, in fact, does not differ from the latter, both rather form one whole, and accordingly are equally justified. Hence, in modern art, if understood and treated correctly, we may very well have a tragedy from citizen life; and comedy, which, in accordance with its nature, prefers

* Compare Carrière, *l.c.*, p. 218 f.

moving in private life (as the play of caprice and chance can here develop itself with more freedom and variety), is no less significant than the historical drama or the kingly tragedy which depicts the fate of nations and their representatives, provided only its subject-matter has a general application to mental life. Wherever, in comedy, ethical earnestness is not only distinctly apparent, but gains a decided preponderance over the comic paralysis of the resolves and endeavours of the dramatic characters, so that that which is directly laughable disappears, and wit and jest find no support, or merely exist as bye-play—there the representation comes to resemble that form, which in more recent times has been distinguished in Germany from tragedy and comedy by the name *Schauspiel*, that is, a play in which, as in Shakspeare's 'Measure for Measure' and 'Cymbeline,' the action leads to a serious complication somewhat similar to a tragic conflict, where, however, the *dénouement* does not end in a tragic catastrophe, but, like the conclusion of a comedy, results in the restoration of what is right and good, and therefore in the welfare and satisfaction of the dramatic personages.

But even among comedies, in the narrower sense of the word, there is a considerable difference in form, character, and composition, between plays like 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'The Tempest,' 'As You Like It,' and those of another species, such as 'All's Well that Ends Well,' 'The Merchant of Venice,' 'Much Ado About Nothing,' etc. But this difference, also, is explained by the general conception of the comic upon which Shakspeare's comedies are founded. If, as has been said, Shakspeare's idea of the comic is essentially nothing but the dialectics of irony, which make the represented world of caprice and chance the instrument of its own dissolution, by the contradictions it itself contains, then accordingly it is clear that comedy can comprehend and represent human life in its two principal but different aspects. *Either* it exhibits human life more in its inner *subjective* aspect, as born and shaped by the doings and endeavours, the desires and passions, plans and freaks, of the different characters, in short, as dependent upon and determined by human wishes and endeavours, which in Comedy is always represented

in the many forms of caprice*—and this species may be called *comedy of character or intrigue*. (Its usual prosaic form of reality must, in accordance with its nature, remain unchanged; its object being rather to reflect reality as faithfully as possible, and to represent it externally in precisely the same manner as, under the given conditions of time and place, under prevailing circumstances and relations, it must be formed naturally and empirically.) Or, it conceives human life more in an *objective* manner, so that chance and caprice, as *general* forces which embrace the kingdom of nature as well as the world of man, govern it like a kind of *destiny*. Caprice and accident, however, are in themselves thoroughly fantastic; for the fantastic is, in fact, nothing but the caprice of fancy, the groundlessness and incoherency of the images which go beyond the order and laws of nature, and thus injure, confound, and transform them. This results in the *fantastic comedy*, in which consequently the external, natural form of common reality seems to be done away with, or, at all events, appears permeated by strange, wonderful phenomena, mere creations of the fancy, or beings of an entirely different nature and sphere of life—precisely such as are brought before us in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ and in ‘The Tempest.’ Only, the representation must invariably maintain this form, as one actually existing, and treat all fantastic singularities and wonders which it displays before us, exactly like the most ordinary occurrences of everyday life; then it will readily produce the highest comic effect.

Both of these species of comedy, however, show themselves in Shakspeare only as what they really are, in other words, as different artistic forms of essentially the same substance. Hence they pass over easily and naturally one into the other; no comedy belongs *absolutely* and *purely* only to the one or the other species; each can be reckoned as one or the other only in so far as fancy or intrigue maintain a certain predominance. In general, however, Shakspeare’s fantastic comedies are of greater value

* This is the usual character of modern comedy, which has been developed to the highest point of perfection, more particularly by some Spanish and French poets (Lope, Calderon, Moreto, Molière, Scribe, etc.).

than his comedies of intrigue; at all events, the former make upon us—who are the children of our age—a pure and more beneficial impression than the latter. And as regards his dramatic poems in general, the same may again be said of his tragedies and historical pieces as compared with his comedies and those which we would call *Schauspiele*.* In his tragedies and historical dramas the defects or faults which more or less frequently offend our taste and æsthetic judgment are invariably only *isolated* defects or faults; they have already been alluded to in a general way, but in the following Books, when examining the separate pieces, I shall point these out more in detail. In his comedies, on the other hand, we have not only to censure one or other particular point, but the whole piece often no longer gives us any actual pleasure; it appears strange, antiquated, stiff, sometimes even tedious. This will happen to every comic poet, the further his age and poetry are removed from the time being, and its forms and interests of life. This is an inevitable consequence, because, in the domain of comedy, every poet in his productions, even the greatest genius, is far more dependent upon actual life, upon the spirit and the character of the nation and age to which he belongs. For it is just common reality and its representatives that he has more especially to portray, and even where he rises above it, into the free region of fancy, it is in reality again only common, actual life—even though in general features, in the concave mirror of wit and humour—which he brings before us under the transparent disguise of his strange fantastic forms. But the manners and customs, the forms of social life and intercourse, the relations of the different classes of the people among one another, taste and opinion, language and mode of expression—in short, the kernel and shell of the ‘body of the time,’ vary with every new generation which rises in the stream of history. This, however, also causes the conception of the comic to vary in form and substance. Comedy, in accordance with its very nature, as already said, is far more dependent than tragedy, upon the subjectivity of man, upon the character and disposition, the mood and situation of the individuals, and therefore

* For definition of this word see above, p. 369.

varies with the different nations and periods of time. As a full grown and educated man often cannot see anything comical in that which will draw a peal of laughter from a child or an uneducated man, so persons, relations and conditions, turns of speech and expressions which in earlier times made a decidedly ludicrous impression, can nowadays but slightly, if at all, excite our laughter. For the source of the comic is pre-eminently the sharp striking contrast between what is real, and that which is supposed or intended, and which will act the more drastically the more it is wrought into a manifest contradiction. But the contrast which we see daily ceases to make any impression upon us. Custom destroys the effect of the most laughable behaviour, as well as of the most comical situations and expressions. Shakspeare, for instance, in his comedies is fond of placing the most gigantic exaggerations, the most extravagant, most caricatured images and similes into the mouths of his punsters and comic figures; —I need only remind the reader of the overflowing wealth of hyperbolical comparisons which Prince Henry pours upon his fat friend Falstaff, and which the latter occasionally gives him back. No doubt they had their effect in those days, for Shakspeare, 'the only Shake-scene,' must surely have known very well what was appropriate and effective on the stage of his day. Exaggeration nowadays no longer produces any right effect, perhaps because our ideas and opinions, as well as our conditions and circumstances, have long lived in an increasing and excessive state of tension, or because we have accustomed ourselves to look for truth and reality, not in its natural simple dress, but, as it were, in the bulging crinoline of intentional and unintentional exaggeration, or in the fluttering lace-dress of forced points. Shakspeare's already censured fondness for punning and quibbling upon words can, as I think, be explained by the simple fact that in his day punning was something new; it had been introduced by John Lilly into English comedy shortly before, and the so-called 'euphuism,' that is, play on words in all possible forms, predominated in the conversation of the educated circles even in Shakspeare's time. Nowadays puns no longer produce the intended effect, >

perhaps because we have become too much accustomed to them also: we daily hear extensive quibbling of words at meetings, assemblies and associations of all kinds, we are daily regaled with rebuses and calembours both good and bad. In addition to this we must consider the realistic tendency of our age; even in comedy we demand a more compact and palpable form. The play upon words which is invariably also a play of thought, the dashes of humour, the sarcasms and witty ideas have to be understood and reflected in thoughts; the finer and more ingenious they are the greater is their demand for acuteness of judgment and quickness of reflection; but, nowadays when people go to the theatre they are tired and worn out by the practical activity of the day—therefore, farces, burlesques and drollery give more pleasure.

Nevertheless, the excess of word-play in Shakspeare's comedies will always remain a defect, the more so as it frequently delights in moving on the slippery ground of dirty allusions and equivokes. In general, however, many of Shakspeare's comedies rise too little above the level of the eccentricities, one-sidednesses, weaknesses, and failings of his time; hence, they cannot well appear on the modern stage in their original form. Managers of theatres are therefore quite right in requiring these comedies to be altered and remodelled for the stage, provided only that this is done by an able hand, and with a dramatico-poetical understanding. Criticism, on the other hand, here, as everywhere, must be just, and must therefore estimate Shakspeare's works not according to the demands of the taste of the present day, nor merely according to the standard of the æsthetic ideal, but, at the same time, judge them from an historical standpoint, as the productions of their age, of a certain period of development, and a stage of culture in dramatic art. For this reason it was necessary before turning to a critical examination of Shakspeare's separate pieces to give a sketch of the history of the Shakspearean, that is, of the English drama, and to explain the æsthetic principles upon which it is based.

BOOK IV.

SHAKSPEARE'S TRAGEDIES.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE CRITICISM OF HIS DRAMAS.

THE object of criticising a genuine work of art is to obtain a profound and clear understanding of it. To understand a work of art, however, is the same thing as perceiving all the details in their internal, living relation to the whole, and the whole in the unity and harmony, design and necessity of its organisation; a work of art admitting of being understood in this sense is, at the same time, a proof of its beauty. True criticism, therefore, has nothing in common with that comparative reflection which either—as is most frequently done, because most easy—compares a work of art with one similar or dissimilar, measures it by some standard from without, and metes out praise or blame by self-made principles and ideas in order to bestow praise or blame, or which examines it from some external, historical, philosophical or other stand-point in order to assign to it its position and importance, that is, to enrol it well or ill in some system of æsthetics or some pragmatistical form of history. There is, however, but one stand-point for the examination of a work of art, and that lies within the work itself. To criticise, does indeed signify to distinguish, to analyse, to judge; the work must certainly, so to say, be dissected, not, however, in order to form comparisons, to apply theories, or to vindicate certain stand-points, but in order to become acquainted with its structure, to penetrate into its inmost life, and to make it again rise up out of the latter, hence, to recognise the internal design and

harmony of its organism, and the unity of the body and spirit, which pervades its formation and composition, and all its various parts and members. The object of true criticism is to comprehend the work of art in its own *significance*. The significance of a thing, however, is its relation to what is general, its value and applicability to what is general; the greater its significance, the more general is its applicability. To comprehend the significance of a work of art, therefore, is to recognise that, and how far, it represents not *only* single characters, deeds, and destinies, but, in them, the *general* essence of nature, of man, of the world and the world's history; how, and how far it has succeeded in raising the *special* into the image and likeness of what is *general*, such as affects and surrounds our own selves. True criticism, consequently, is essentially a reproduction. The critic acts in the same manner as the poet; not, however, by the power of the artistic imagination, but by the power of perceptive thought, which seeks to penetrate the given work, and to prove it to be a thought of the creative mind. The poet *introduces* and *produces* his inner views into the world of phenomena, so that the thought itself becomes the phenomenon; the critic, on the other hand, acts conversely, he *reduces* this phenomenon to the thought. The act of *reducing* is, however, at the same time a *producing*, and both together form a *reproducing*, inasmuch as the thought embodied in it grows out of the recognising and the comprehending the work of art. And in the same way, conversely, the artistic production contains a reduction (one, indeed, that is accomplished unconsciously, in so far as the wide, varied, unsurveyable world of forms and phenomena must first be condensed into an inner perception, and thus become a solid nucleus) before it can rise out of the latter in an artistic shape, that is, in the form of beauty. Hence the critic's production also is in reality a reproduction; beauty itself is a mental *act*, which consists of a reproduction of the phenomenal, natural existence, according to its innate, but invisible laws and designs, and whose peculiar object is only to exhibit the internal harmony of these designs and laws.

It may indeed be (as von Friesen, in his ingenious letters

on 'Hamlet,' thinks) that the poet, in the first place, is only attracted by the poetical halo of the phenomenon, in which an incident, an action, or character, reveal themselves to his eye, that he is then induced to give a representation of them, and that, accordingly, his only object is clearly and distinctly to exhibit this phenomenon in its poetical aspect. But the poetical phenomenon is, after all, only the form and expression of a poetical substance, consequently the expression of a poetical thought which, even though deeply concealed, must of necessity be contained in it, because it becomes a *poetical* phenomenon only by being expressed. A poet proves himself to be great by the fact that, in and with the poetic phenomenon—by working it out in its inner perception into an object of scenic representation—he at the same time (at first perhaps only instinctively, half unconsciously) brings into view the poetical substance, and contrives to give it a general significance and those ideal relations which raise the poetical thought into the *idea*, in the above-stated sense of the word. At all events, the dramatic poet cannot rest satisfied with the poetical part of the mere phenomenon, for his object is to describe full, living, human characters, and their inner, mental, and moral life, to make the action proceed from these, and hence, in all cases, to explain the motives which determine the wishes and actions, the sufferings and destinies of men. These motives, however, and the designs and intentions formed by them, are thoughts, and if these thoughts are purely individual ideas, representing entirely individuals' interests, desires, and inclinations, if, in fact, they are not founded upon some definite conception of human life, and do not give a reflection of it, in other words, if they are devoid of all general significance, then the representation will in no way appeal to the heart and mind of the spectator; it will leave him perfectly indifferent, or, at most, awaken the interest of a passing anecdote. If, on the other hand, it possesses a general significance, then this very significance is its poetical substance, the thought by which it is pervaded, and the idea which is manifested in it. It naturally determines the whole form of the work, and therein lies the unity and the appropriateness of its organism, the harmony of its arrangement and

composition. We may, therefore, say that the business of the critic is essentially confined to pointing out the idea upon which the whole work is based.

There are two ways by which the critic may arrive at his object—the *historical* and the *æsthetic*. In the present day the former is generally the more popular, partly because both genuine and counterfeit thoughts are daily brought into the market in such quantities, that the price of the commodity is falling, partly because the realistic tendency of our age is inclined to consider all æsthetic criticism and philosophy, all ideas and regulating conceptions, as mere freaks of the imagination. Historical criticism, on the other hand, not only agrees better with this realistic tendency, but also requires thorough study and knowledge, which are not such cheap articles and are still held in some estimation. For historical criticism looks upon the work of art as an historical phenomenon, and, accordingly, endeavours to show how its origin has, in the first place, to be explained by given conditions, the co-operation of different circumstances and relations, etc., secondly, in what way it has sprung from the life, the mind and the character of the artist; and lastly, how, as the product of the history of art and the development of the human mind in general, it may have proceeded from the character of the age, its mood, its tendency, or its relation to the past and future. Historical criticism, in this way, endeavours to ascertain the meaning of the work of art and the intention of the poet. Æsthetic criticism, on the other hand, views the artistic work purely by itself, apart from all such relations, as a special world shut up within itself, and endeavours to understand it simply by the power of perceptive thought, and to point out its meaning from within itself. Both methods have their rocks and shallows. The historical critic is apt to see in every work of art only the thoughts, tendencies, and interests of his time, and does not recognise just that which is generally applicable in it—that which at once raises it above its time—he is also apt to confound the poet's individuality with his poems, so that one might perhaps become acquainted with the former, but not with the independent value of the latter, and again he is apt to over-

look the fact that the spirit of the poet's artistic genius is influenced by impulses and strivings of which the poet is himself not always conscious, and which frequently lead him far beyond the goal of his conscious motives and intentions. The æsthetic critic, on the other hand, often introduces into the work thoughts which it does not at all contain, or he is inclined to maintain a so-called standpoint above or beside the work of art, because the position within the same affords him no true security, and thus, disregarding its historical foundation, he refers the work to conditions, tendencies and ideas of the present which are completely foreign to it. The result is we obtain all kinds of reflections from the critic, but no criticism.

The best plan, therefore, undoubtedly, is to unite the two points of view, for indeed they absolutely belong to each other. This I have endeavoured to do, so far as it was possible in the case of Shakspeare's works. For historical criticism, as is self-evident, is of its very nature practicable only to a certain extent, and in Shakspeare's works is more than usually confined and limited, partly because they do not contain the indispensable information about the poet's life and character, partly also, because, from reasons already adduced, it is impossible to determine, with certainty, the date of the origin of his several works, and lastly also, because many of Shakspeare's works have not come down to us in their original form, and all of them, as already said, seem but little affected by the *special* tendencies, interests and ideas of his time. Thus historical criticism is in want of the necessary means and connecting links, without which it cannot exist, and, therefore, the attempts which seek to trace and explain Shakspeare's personal mind and character from his works, or conversely, to trace and explain his works from the supposed course of the development of his mind, have all completely failed, or possess at most the value of an hypothesis more or less plausible. Historical criticism must, accordingly, confine itself to an historical representation of the course of the development of dramatic art down to the death of Shakspeare, to a general description of his age and to an examination of the little we know of the poet's life and

character. As regards his individual works, historical criticism must leave the field in the hands of æsthetic criticism, and can only occasionally be of assistance to it.

It has already been frequently remarked, and among others by Goethe,* that 'Shakspeare did not, like other poets, choose for his works any special subject, but that he placed an idea in the centre of the whole and refers the world and the universe to this idea, and that it would be difficult to find a poet whose individual works were so invariably founded upon *different* ideas influencing the whole, as can be proved to be the case with his.' This is in fact one of his characteristic peculiarities, for while the principal works of other poets are frequently only variations of a single theme, representations of one or of some ideas prevailing in their time, every poem of Shakspeare's turns upon its own axis, each is, as it were, a world in itself, pervaded by its own peculiar spirit. It is only the man who can rise up to Shakspeare's own lofty standpoint, that may perhaps be able to perceive how all these different constellations are again but a part of one great cosmic whole. This circumstance increases the difficulties of finding what Goethe calls the central idea (*den centralen Begriff*), that is, of discovering and clearly pointing out the fundamental idea in Shakspeare's various dramas. Shakspeare is not only so modest, so dramatically objective, that he rather conceals than reveals his artistic motives, his intentions and ideas, he not only always presents us with such great varieties of characters, actions and events, that our conception is apt to become confused, and that the central point—upon which all revolves, in spite of the apparent caprice and irregularity—can be discovered only with trouble and difficulty; but he also possesses such a variety of different points of view for contemplating human affairs, and consequently such an abundance of poetical ideas, that it is only a mind as gifted as his that could exhaust his mine of wealth.

Hence any undertaking made to discover the ideas and points of view that guided Shakspeare in the composition of his dramas can only claim to be regarded as an attempt. Every new period will discover newer and

* *Shakspeare und kein Ende. Werke*, vol. 45.

more important relations to the centre of the whole, every new critic will consider that he has found this centre in a different place; for every genuine work of art, in reality, bears within itself the whole wealth of life. To take into consideration all the different relations and conceptions—which perhaps are all equally justified, because they are but the multifarious refractions of one and the same ray of light—could not, therefore, be my intention here, as in that case every piece would have demanded a separate volume. For this reason I had to refrain from giving a critical analysis of the separate dramas. All that I can do is to give the results of my investigations, that is, to unfold, in the case of every play, my conception of the fundamental idea in the above-stated sense of the word, and to give intimations as to how it appears to have determined the choice of the characters, the course of the action, the circumstances and relations upon which they are founded, etc.; in short, as to how the tone and colouring, the style and composition of the work seems to be dependent upon it.

The several plays I have here arranged—for reasons mentioned above—in a mere hypothetical order, not in the succession in which, as I believe, they chronologically appeared, but in an ideal order, the principle of which every careful reader will readily discover.

CHAPTER I.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

"THE ideal picture presented to us in 'Romeo and Juliet,' " says Schlegel, "is a glorious hymn of praise to that inexpressible feeling which ennobles the soul in the highest degree, and even changes the senses themselves into soul, but is at the same time a sad elegy upon its frailty, by reason of its very nature and of external circumstances. It is both the deification and the funeral of love," etc. That the chief interest of this drama turns upon the loves of Romeo and Juliet, is self-evident. And yet I should not care to believe that the meaning and object of the whole was *only* to express the substance of what is eternal and transitory in love, *only* to represent the nature of love. In 'its very nature' love is by no means transitory, nor is it so by reason of 'external circumstances.' Moreover, to attain this end there would have been no necessity for the extensive apparatus, the quarrel and struggle between the two great families, the interference of the Prince, the participation of the whole community in the action. Love, as I think, rather forms but the ground upon which the poet here takes his stand, the central point of that side of human life which he wishes to describe, the nucleus of that 'body of the time,' upon which he wishes to bring 'pressure.' He may conceive it thus: love, in the first place as the love of the betrothed, is the foundation of marriage, therefore of the family, and again of the state, consequently of the development and formation of the whole human race. It is, therefore, the central idea to which all life may be referred, and is, in reality, the highest and sublimest of what man possesses, for it is the source of all morality, of all beauty, of all human greatness. It is upon this foundation that Shakspeare raises

his structure; from it he contemplates life and gives us a picture, which becomes a tragedy because it is taken from the stand-point of the tragic conception of the world. In other words, the love of the betrothed is here but the material into which he breathes his breath, the breath of poetry, by working it into the picture of an aspect of life which is based upon the tragical view of life.

For this purpose Shakspeare raises love on to the sunny heights of the most glowing passion, and contrasts it with a hate equally passionate, thus making the nature of passion itself, passion in its two chief forms, the source of the tragic pathos; for love and hate are, so to speak, the two fundamental passions to which all others may be traced. Passion, however, according to the modern idea of tragedy, is a chief motive in tragic action; for where its substance is great, noble and morally just—to which man, impelled by it, subjects all his powers and capabilities, his whole being and life—it is the expression of the highest dignity of human nature, of that ideal capability to be filled with enthusiasm for what is great, noble and beautiful, even to complete self-forgetfulness. But, in so far as man in passion—while aiming at the *one* great and beautiful object—not only forgets himself, but the general moral order of the world, and, in the pursuit of his own right, tramples upon the rights and duties of others, or, in so far as—blinded by it—he confounds the great and beautiful object about which he is wholly captivated, with the *enjoyment* which it affords *himself*, and seeks *his* own satisfaction only in the possession of it, regardless of the weal or woe of others—passion at the same time becomes the most pregnant expression of ethical weakness in the multifarious forms which it may assume, either as one-sidedness or limitation of the moral aim, or, as an error and perversity of judgment, or, again, as a weakness of will, or the want of consideration and self-control. Hence, a grand and noble passion may readily be found to contain both that which is great, beautiful and eternal in man, and that which is little, ugly and transitory, and these two sides become combined into an indissoluble unity, into an emotion that affects the whole man. Thus conceived every great passion is, even in itself, of a tragical nature.

Romeo's and Juliet's love is of an ideal beauty, the ethereal fire of two great, rich hearts, the tenderest and at once the firmest bond of two noble natures, which, as it were, are created for love and in their inmost nature destined for each other; the one beholding in the other its own more beautiful self, the embodied ideal of its deepest longings and strivings, the symbol of the highest ideal beauty. Accordingly, at first sight, their souls flow one into the other for an external and perfect unity; "like the lightning which doth cease to be, ere one can say—It lightens," as suddenly and irresistibly is there kindled in their hearts that glowing flame, the tragic, fatal power of which they indeed suspect, without, however, being able or wishing to resist it. This love becomes tragic, not, as might be supposed, in the antique sense—on account of its ideal beauty and greatness, through the envy of the immortal gods, or through the power of Nemesis, which threatens everything that is uncommon and extraordinary, nor from the prosaically correct, but unpoetical and ethically untrue reason, that love is but a special feeling, but the 'companion of life,' and that, therefore, it is not becoming in a man, at least, to be completely and wholly absorbed by it—but simply because from the very beginning, it was an overpowering and reckless passion as well.

This very passionateness is its poetry, its force and grandeur; quickened by its glowing warmth, the noble manliness of Romeo's character, and the lovely, tender womanliness of Juliet's nature, rapidly develop into full bloom; sustained by it, the two rise above all the petty, prosaic, selfish interests of love, and scar high above a common earthly existence, in the ether of the bright sphere of the ideal; steeled by it, they overcome the terrors of death, and in dying, put their seal upon the immortality of love, the sublimity of the struggling mind over suffering and ruin, the sovereignty of the realm of poetry over all hostile powers. But as, in consequence of this passion, they make the right of their love the sole, exclusive law of the world, their own good the general and sole good, and as they lose sight of the sanctity of the moral order of the world, so their

passion, at the same time, is a rebellion against the prevailing power of the moral necessity; it separates itself from the organism of the whole; it, so to say, trespasses beyond the boundaries of the good and the beautiful, and by disturbing the internal harmony of the moral powers, involuntarily falls into the opposite domain. The lovers, by completing their union on their own responsibility against the will and knowledge of their parents, not only break through the barriers of custom and of tradition, but utterly destroy the bond, and injure the right of family relationship; they thereby offend a moral power which has the right—both internally and externally, to put itself on a perfect equality with their love. But their passion is mixed with the selfish instinct and desire of sensual enjoyment and personal gratification (as the second and third scenes of Act iii. distinctly prove). It is this element of selfishness—though only a secondary, concealed and, it may be, natural element—that makes them lose that power of reflection and self-control, of which the great passion is not only capable, but by virtue of which alone it is able to accomplish what is great. This is why their passion degenerates into that blind fury, into which Romeo falls when—upon hearing that he is to be banished—he throws himself upon the ground, and is on the point of ruining all by a rash and senseless attempt at suicide. It is this same want of reflection and self-control that manifests itself in the inconsiderate haste with which Romeo throws himself between the swords of Mercutio and Tybalt, and thus having caused the death of the former, in a fierce single combat also gives the latter his death-blow; accordingly he himself lays the foundation of the tragic catastrophe. With the same inconsiderate haste, the same obstinate violence of mind, he rushes off to kill himself, upon hearing the accidental report of Juliet's death; he does not stay to receive a more accurate account, does not stay to ask Friar Laurence for further particulars, he merely follows the passionate impulse of the moment.

This reckless passion, this fatal vehemence of love is contrasted by a *hate* quite as passionate and as fatal. Hate is, as it were, but the reverse of love, the same passion in

its negative force; the Nay which is directly contained in the Yea of love, and which expresses itself with the same energy against all that is hostile to it, as when asserting itself. In so far love and hate challenge each other mutually, and in so far it may be said that Shakspeare was justified in leaving us completely in the dark as to the cause and occasion of the terrible family feud between the Montagues and Capulets. What he had to do was to exhibit this correlation in the nature of love; and therefore he connects the passion of the lovers with an equally passionate hate which threatens their very existence. Their love has to overcome this hate and to assert itself in opposition to it; whether, and in what way their love conquers it, will be the test of their power and their right, the central and turning point of their fate. This explains the apparent contradiction that, from out of the very midst of the deadly enmity of the parents, there arises the consuming love of the children, extremes meet, not accidentally, but by reason of their inmost nature. The transgression of the moral law, which lies in the irreconcilable hatred of the parents, takes its revenge upon the children, and through them again upon the parents themselves.* For the destructive element in hate exists also in love—in spite of the contradiction—for both are one in passion. Regarded in this light, even the foundation upon which the whole play is based manifests an internal necessity which determines its structure, and which has its seat in human nature itself.

This tragic contrariety is the key to the tragic action in all its essential features. The tragic conflict of the rights and duties is given: on the one side we have Romeo's and Juliet's love in the full justice of its ideal beauty, their marriage as a necessary demand of this love, not as a merely subjective, but as an objective *moral* necessity—for marriage ought to be desired where there is genuine and sincere love;—on the other side we have the

* Act v. 3.

"See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love!
And I, for winking at your discords too,
Have lost a brace of kinsmen:—all are punish'd."

equally justified right of the parents, the sacred sphere of the family bond, which cannot be broken with impunity. Accordingly, right and wrong are so interwoven with one another, that the right of the lovers is, at the same time, a wrong, their secret marriage both a moral and an immoral proceeding. The task of the tragic action is to solve this contradiction. The first five or six scenes therefore, in the first place, exhibit the problem clearly and distinctly, they elucidate and build up the foundation, and also intimate the positions of the dramatic characters towards one another. In Shakspeare's usual manner, definite groups detach and arrange themselves according to the degree of their importance. In the centre stand Romeo and Juliet with their love, behind, assisting and influencing them, stand Friar Laurence and the Nurse; on one side the Montagues and their adherents, Mercutio and Benvolio; on the other, the ruder passionateness of the Capulets, with Tybalt and Count Paris; but above them all, and yet in the background, stands the Prince, the representative of the general power of right and morality, who has to protect the ethical whole—the state—against the disturbing attacks of its various members. These groups—every one of which bears within itself a principal motive in the development of the action—then advance towards one another, each coming forward alternately, and thus carry the action forward to its catastrophe entirely of their own accord (each being engaged in the pursuit of its special interests).

By introducing the Prince into the course of the events, Shakspeare gives the history of the lovers a more general, historical interest. A whole state appears to be in violent excitement; the public welfare is at stake; the Prince, for the sake of its preservation, intercedes between the contending parties, and thus, that which would otherwise have been only a private concern, becomes a state affair, affecting the relation between the community and its members. It was only in a time of general excitement that such violent passions could strike root and gain ground. And as the special is dependent upon the general, and conversely, the history of the lovers could not be completely isolated: the character of the time, the condition of

the state and the prevailing sentiments of the people, had likewise to be given in general features. This, moreover, externally raises the general importance which is implied in the ideal subject of the tragedy. The ruin of the different members is connected with the downfall of whole families, and the ruined condition of the whole, of the family brings crime and misery upon its individual members. Represented in this light, the history of the individual members appears the emblem and symbol of universal history; the same motives, the same conditions and laws prevail equally in both.

As tragedy, according to Shakspeare's conception, stands in *direct* connection with the ethical laws of human life and the ethical motives of human destinies, so, that which in comedy appears to be the work of chance, of error and caprice, in tragedy appears as the result of an internal necessity. This is here shown by the principal events of the dramatic action. It is no matter of chance that Tybalt kills Mercutio, and Romeo Tybalt, but the unavoidable consequence, partly of the inconsiderate passionateness in Romeo's nature, partly of the prevailing hate between the two families. Both Mercutio and Tybalt are, therefore, by no means unnecessary, subordinate characters; the former in the cheerful levity of the coarse, quarrelsome, reckless humour—with which he, at the same time, counterbalances the dull seriousness of the passion which prevails all around, and relieves it of its oppressive weight—Tybalt in the blind, gloomy zeal of his savage nature—both are the active representatives of this party feud, which, as such, must inevitably express itself in murder and death. The calm, considerate Benvolio seeks in vain to extinguish the flames of the strife, but his function in the organism of the whole is to show that, in fact, it is inextinguishable; the two old men, Montague and Capulet—the actual originators of the feud—powerless and incapable of acting, yet for this very reason the more significant representatives of the invisible power of this hatred—are there, for no other purpose than to suffer and to reap the bloody harvest which they themselves had sown.

It is no mere chance that Romeo remains in the mistaken

belief that Juliet is dead, or that the latter does not awake at least a few minutes sooner than she does, before Romeo has swallowed the poison. Friar Laurence's pious deception, which proceeded from the quiet solitude of philosophical enquiry, and his contemplative but loving view of things, cannot strike root on this unsteady, volcanic soil, amid the rushing torrent of such passions; such heterogeneous elements repel each other. As Romeo replies to the solaces of philosophy by attempting suicide, and as he casts off all reflection and consideration, he cannot, of course, be saved by the proffered help of considerate, meditative philosophy; it is the hand of that invisible divine power which guides the whole, which directs chance, and withholds Laurence's letter, in order that the tragic conflict may be solved in a truly tragic manner, in such a way that, at the same time, it is also conciliatory and elevating to the mind.

Even the sudden freak of Romeo and his friends to attend the feast of the Capulets, which was the first step in the whole succession of the tragic events, is divested of its character of chance and caprice. Profoundly does the poet remind us, by the mouth of the witty Mercutio, of those mysterious relations between the inner and outer life, between the past and future, which sometimes reveal themselves emblematically to the foreboding soul in dreams. Romeo, frightened by a dream, yields to the invitation of his friends almost involuntarily and reluctantly; his mind misgives him that 'some consequence, yet hanging in the stars, shall bitterly begin its fearful date with this night's revels,' and yet he goes to meet it, urged on by an internal necessity. And this necessity, what is it, but that dark, and yet certain connection between the inner and outer world, that mysterious and yet indubitable interaction between the character of man and his destiny, by which the outer circumstances correspondingly answer to the inner tendency of the mind, and by which, in the present case, the fatal power of love, which has enslaved Romeo's whole being, is met by the external occasion.

As regards the characters, no one will deny, that in conception and treatment they entirely correspond with

this internal necessity of the tragic action; the one is the direct result of the other. But as it is not my intention to enter very minutely into Shakspeare's skill in the delineation of characters—about which so much has already been written, and which is just what can be most easily recognised, except in such cases where the correct conception of the characters is difficult, or where the understanding of the whole is mainly dependent upon them—I shall confine myself to some general remarks and to briefly defending Shakspeare against the unfounded censure which has been cast upon him, less in regard to the delineation, than in regard to the *choice* of his characters. Especial offence has been taken, in this respect, at the person of the Nurse, at her equivocal stories and expressions, her fondness for match-making, her fickleness and her entire want of character. I have already thrown out some hints as to the importance of the comic element in this person. Schlegel * also has made some excellent observations to justify the poet, but these, as it seems to me, do not hit the main point. At all events they do not decide the question as to why this character—even though its truth to life and reality are undeniable—is conceived in this one light and in no other. In my opinion this seems to be a proof of Shakspeare's skill in furnishing a motive for every character, which skill has often been disputed, and certainly is often but very gently suggested by the poet. This lasciviousness, this delight in match-making, this eagerness to let her nursing taste the pleasures of love as early as possible, this wantonness in the character of the Nurse—who takes the mother's place with Juliet, and has been her constant companion and attendant from infancy to girlhood—could not have remained without its influence upon Juliet's nature and the formation of her character; it partly, at all events, accounts for her pining, longing for love, the impatience and the vehemence of the desire which so quickly leads the girl—still in the bud of maidenhood—into the arms of the lover, in utter disregard of the considerations due to her parents and family. The character of the Nurse, therefore, at the same time, casts a severe reproach upon Juliet's

* *Kritiken und Characteristiken.*

mother—obviously a proud, cold and hard hearted woman—who lets the Nurse fill her place, and consequently could not possibly have won her daughter's love and confidence.

Still less can I agree with the objection which supposes that Friar Laurence's undutiful compliance with the wishes of the lovers, is wanting in motive, unnatural and inconsistent with his character. Would Laurence's refusal have altered or improved the state of affairs? Would it have been able to cause the swelling torrent to return to its bed? Would not the passion of the lovers have rather taken illegally what was denied them by law? Laurence is portrayed quite in the spirit of the catholic clergy; as a father confessor, he is on intimate and familiar terms with the two lovers, he loves them himself with a paternal affection, and because he loves them he wishes to make them happy. Moreover, his heart is still warm enough to understand their glowing passion. This is why he unites them in marriage, this is why, after the proposal of Count Paris, he endeavours to save Juliet from the destructive anger of her parents; this is why he does not explain that she is already married, but recommends her that desperate 'remedy' which delivers her over to the grave. He knows how to combine practical activity with the contemplative, pensive life he leads (as is proved by his having occupied himself with the study of medicine); moreover, like most catholic priests, he evinces a certain disposition to have his hands engaged in mundane affairs, he cannot resist the thought that by the union of the two lovers he may perhaps accomplish the great work of bringing about a reconciliation between the hostile families. This is also a reason why he enters into Romeo's plans, and having once taken the first step, he has necessarily to pursue the path he has entered upon. Not only the happiness of the lovers, his own interests also, require that he should seek to save Juliet from despair and suicide by the 'desperate remedy.' Some critics have thought the good Friar a herald of the poet's intentions, through whose mouth Shakspeare is supposed to inform us that his poem is by no means a 'hymn of praise,' a 'deification' of love, but on the contrary, that it is meant,

to show us that love is only a 'happy intoxication,' only a 'flower liked for its sweet smell, the poison of which, when taken as food, will work fatally upon the heart.' However, Friar Laurence is in reality not at all so prosaically wise and so good as his eulogisers suppose, he does not deny the ideal power and beauty of the love of Romeo and Juliet, nor the ethical rights of their love, otherwise he would not have married them—an action which directly contradicts his supposed disposition—he does not blame the passion itself, but merely its blind, immoderate vehemence. In Act ii. 3, he very distinctly censures Romeo for his inconstancy to Rosaline, he calls this wavering, a want of strength which is worse in man than in woman; hence, love with him is by no means a mere passing 'happy intoxication.'

The intention, attributed to Shakspeare, is rather to be found in the character of Count Paris. It has been asked, what need is there, at all, for Count Paris and his love affair, and more particularly for the fight between him and Romeo? It is said that his death by the hand of the latter is obviously quite superfluous, wanting in motive, and as meaningless as a mere sensational scene. In answer to this it might at once be said, that nothing is superfluous that gives a clearer insight into the character of the principal hero, and that it must continue to be more fully and definitely unfolded throughout all the incidents of the action. But the chief reason for the death of the calm, cold, prosaic Count lies in his flat, dull and heartless conception of love, in his purposing to bargain with the parents for the beauty and amiability of their daughter—without first consulting the inclinations of her heart—in consideration of his rank, position and untried virtue. This is why the divine power of love, as it were, takes its revenge upon him; his manner of loving, therefore, forms the organic contrast of Romeo's and Juliet's passion; his fate is meant to show us that the poet, in representing the tragic fate of the great, beautiful and poetic passion, had no idea of speaking in behalf of common prose. In a similar way Tybalt and Mercutio fall, not only as the victims to blind party feud, but also in consequence of their position to the fundamental idea of the whole. Mercutio, who does nothing but ridicule love, who

fancies himself above it, and despises it as effeminate trifling, thereby as much offends the divine power of love—which, in this drama, represents, as it were, the moral necessity the power of destiny—as does 'Tybalt the quarrelsome, the 'furious' and the revengeful, who in his uncouthness and savageness is incapable of entertaining the more tender emotions of the heart, and, accordingly, is equally at enmity with the ethical power of love. The same, lastly, applies in a still higher degree to the old Capulets and Montagues; hence they are even more severely punished by the tragic pathos than those who pay for their delusion with their lives.

Romeo and Juliet themselves are pre-eminently the vessels and instruments of this ruling power, this fatal power of love, and for the very reason they are the heroes of the drama, the bearers of the tragic pathos. Both are entirely absorbed in the one great, overwhelming passion; this passion not only forms and develops their character but is, as it were, itself their character, its development, is their life, their fate. Thus we find Romeo, immediately on his first appearance, absorbed in sentimental love for Rosaline. But this love is, in fact, *only* a sentimental fancy, only a desire and longing for love, not love itself; in this craving for love, which has complete possession of him, which urges and drives him onwards, he has made a mistake and taken the first beauty he met, not as the actual object of his love, but, so to say, as the representative, the symbol of the still unknown object of his ardent love. In order to give us a vivid picture of this thirst for love, this tendency of Romeo's whole nature towards being a hero in love, to give us an insight into his romantic character—which is a slave to imagination and emotion—and, on the other hand, to show us the difference between mere sentimental love and the true, genuine passion, between play and seriousness in love—which are so often confounded—the poet at first presents Romeo to us in that almost ludicrous form which is justly ridiculed by Mercutio. Rosaline's Romeo is a melancholy, heavy, idle dreamer, wholly absorbed in his own frosty reflections on the nature of love, which are more witty than true, and who tries to escape not only from the society of his fellow men but from his own

self, so as, in solitude, amid sighs and tears, to build up another world and another self. Juliet's Romeo, on the other hand, is a cheerful, lively youth, of a sparkling mind and wit, still always reserved, it is true, and jealous of his blissful secret, but full of energy and vigour, all sinews on the stretch, every beat of his pulses a bold hope, an inspiring remembrance; he gives himself up to the world and is yet raised above it, he has the fulness of existence within his own breast and is nevertheless not satisfied;—the contrast cannot be greater. The former was the mere shadow of Romeo, an unfortunate gambler who has lost himself, an erring wanderer in search of his home; the latter is the true Romeo, who has found himself again in Juliet, and in her love first wins life and existence. For Juliet is Romeo in female form. Mrs. Jameson observes as ingeniously as correctly: 'All Shakspeare's women being essentially women, either love or have loved, or are capable of loving; but Juliet is love itself. The passion is her state of being, and out of it she has no existence. It is the soul within her soul; the pulse within her heart; the life-blood along her veins, blending with every atom of her frame! The love that is so chaste and dignified in Portia—so airy delicate and fearless in Miranda—so sweetly confiding in Perdita—so playfully fond in Rosalind—so constant in Imogen—so devoted in Desdemona—so fervent in Helen—so tender in Viola—is each and all of these in Juliet; but she reminds us of nothing but her own sweet self.'

In fact, this 'sweet self' is wholly love, but Romeo's self also is nothing but love; each finds in the other only itself again. This unity of their inmost natures contains the sublime power as well as the ideal beauty of their love; their characters unfold all the wealth of their inner life in this unity, this double existence, and rises step by step with the course of the action, from the toying play of sentiment, through the manifold stages of feeling and emotion, soaring up to the sublime heights of tragic pathos, ever borne onwards by the waves of a glowing passion and an active, youthfully-enthusiastic imagination.

The peculiar colouring which Shakspeare has contrived to give his *diction* corresponds with the character of the

two chief characters, with their lives and destinies, and consequently with the substance of the whole representation. The language, as it were, clothes the body of the drama like the wide-flowing garment of antique statues, which does not conceal the beauty of the bodily forms, but rather enhances and, as it were, multiplies them. It appears especially rich in youthful, flowery imagery, as appropriate as it is graceful, peculiarly elastic, pliant and melodious, full of lyrical elements, ever rising and swelling, and of the greatest vitality; it is an ethereal body in which all is pulsating, all nerves vibrating, now rocked in a smiling landscape by the balmy breezes of southern climes, now raised and carried along by the storm of passion and tragic pathos. But, inasmuch as the young and beautiful spirit of betrothed love pervades the whole, the language always flows along in the undulating line of beauty; even where the storm enters and the waves rise, they do not break in sharp angles, but draw their deep furrows in round undulations.

The whole drama bears this same impress of youthful beauty in all its various parts. If 'Romeo and Juliet' be compared with Shakspeare's earlier dramas, with 'Titus Andronicus,' 'Henry VI.,' 'Richard III.,' which were written much about the same time, or with the later great tragedies of 'King Lear,' 'Othello,' 'Macbeth,' a striking contrast will become manifest. For while in these the action and the tragic pathos seem placed in the hands of mature men, or of old but vigorous men, in the present case the heroes and bearers of the action, Romeo and Juliet, Tybalt, Mercutio, and Count Paris, are all persons in the bloom of youth. And while in the former cases the action, in the height of its development, presents us with almost nothing but scenes of horror and terror, in the present case it gives us nothing but pictures of grace and beauty; even the scene in the sepulchre containing the open coffin of the apparently dead Juliet, illuminated by Romeo's torch, is a picture surrounded by the charm of romantic beauty. And while in the former cases the tragic pathos appears carried to the climax of the terrible, the overwhelming, and the destructive, here it remains within the compass of beauty, and rises only up to a feeling of deep, intense

sorrow. The lovely picture presented by the two lovers even in their death, softens the pain at their tragic end. Of all Shakspeare's tragedies, the one most closely akin to 'Romeo and Juliet' is his 'Hamlet;' but even here the hideous crime which forms the basis of the play and the horrible appearance of the ghost, obscure the ray of sweet beauty which is cast over 'Romeo and Juliet.'

This characteristic feature of beauty, this unison of peculiarly intense and tender harmony, which soothes all discords and lessens all harshnesses, is shown, lastly, also by the *composition* of the whole, which, in the genuine dramatic work of art naturally results from the choice of the characters, from the determination of their position in life, and from the development of the action in word and deed. For the composition, that is, the *form* of the artistic work which holds all the parts together, is, in fact, nothing but the harmonious co-operation of the constituent elements of the drama, that is, for developing and bringing into view the *idea* which forms its foundation. Shakspeare, as we shall see, is fond of exhibiting his leading thoughts in various ways and from different points of view. Thus, in the present case also, the fundamental idea is, as it were, carried out doubly, once thetically, by the main action in the loves of Romeo and Juliet, then antithetically by the secondary action, in the love of Count Paris for Juliet; directly and indirectly, however, in the characters, deeds and fortunes of all the other persons who take part in the action. For all, as we have seen, are placed in a definite relation to the tragic power of love which rules the whole, and assigns to them their parts, in accordance with their position. It is only at the end, at the catastrophe, that the idea of the whole bursts, so to speak, out of its enveloping calyx, and appears in the broad light of day as the fruit, the result of the represented action. The conclusion of the tragedy is the reconciliation of the tragic conflict, the solution of the contradiction into which the elements of the moral order of the universe have fallen with one another, owing to the weakness and delusion of its bearers. Romeo's and Juliet's love retains its right, but only in, and by death which destroys the selfishness of their desires and enjoyment, the one-sidedness and immoderation of

their reckless passion, which injured the rights of others; in death, purified from the dross of earthly existence, they assume the glorified form of ideal beauty. Their love retains its right, for, in death the lovers are united *with* the sanction of their parents; the dissolving as well as assimilating power of death removes the contradiction of their existence, bursts the fetters which the party-feud placed around their loves, and melts the icy crust which had separated the hearts of the Capulets and Montagues; over their grave the furious party-feud ends in reconciliation and even resolves itself into love.

The fundamental idea of the whole, accordingly, is, we may say, the young man's view of life, but reflected within the tragic conception of the world. With him existence still turns entirely upon the love of his betrothed; his young and bold endeavour to open up the world for himself, and to conquer a place in it for himself, is concentrated in the possession of the woman he loves; she, whom his imagination has endowed with all heaven's gifts, is to him the living unity of all existence, the symbol, the personification of all bliss; to possess her, to lose her, is to him equivalent to life and death. The form, however, in which this love exhibits itself, in which its nature is conceived and its pathos passed through, is not only the most striking feature of a single character, but a pregnant expression of the character of all peoples and periods of civilization. Romeo's and Juliet's love is the poetic reflection of that conception which was peculiar to the spirit of modern Europe, more especially to the spirit which prevailed in Germany during the Middle Ages; it is the *romantic* form, the *romantic* idea of love. This sublime self-will, which risks all life for its union with the one individual, as if there existed nothing else in the world that was great, beautiful and amiable, is expressed in that boundless dignity and significance, which the modern view of life—in contrast to antiquity—attributes to the individual person, to man in his individuality. To exhibit the truth and everlastingness of this conception in tragic conflict with the weakness, one-sidedness and narrowness of human nature, but also in its tragic victory over all

adverse and hostile forces, this is the true meaning, the ideal character of this tragedy of Shakspeare's, which is acknowledged to be one of the greatest masterpieces of dramatic art.

In conclusion let me add a few remarks in regard to the closing scene of the drama. It has been objected to, and sometimes altered or omitted, because it was supposed that Shakspeare had there offended the laws of dramatic art, inasmuch as, instead of directly closing with the death of the lovers, he added a superfluous scene of explanation and enquiry which weakened the tragic impression. But is the scene merely one of explanation and enquiry? Has the tragedy no other object than of shaking the nerves of the spectators out of their ordinary state of lassitude, by scenes of murder and suicide? Would not the death of beauty, greatness and nobility leave the impression of a revolting murder, did it not, at the same time, express a soothing, elevating solace? And this solace, which is an element in the conception of tragic pathos—inasmuch as it also portrays human greatness and beauty in its purification, and hence in its true, ideal reality—sounds forth from this closing scene in the soft harmony of a calm, intense sadness, a harmony in which all harshness is resolved into sweet sound. The lovers have fallen victims to the hostile powers of their earthly existence, which check and combat all ideals; powers which oppose their union, partly from within, partly from without. But their love rises from the tomb pure and golden—like the Phoenix from its ashes—not only to obtain a happier existence in another world, but also to continue to live in this, and to prove its divine power in its victory over the grim hate which opposed it. No more significant, more exalting or more affecting funeral elegy can be conceived, than is here presented to the lovers—the victims of a high, noble and ideal striving—by the beautiful, deeply poetical drama.

CHAPTER II.

OTHELLO.

'OTHELLO' has always appeared to me to be the most fearful of all Shakspeare's tragedies. My sympathies are as much attracted as repelled by it; the feeling excited in me is much the same as that excited by persons who possess irresistible attractions owing to the power and superiority of their minds, but are nevertheless decidedly repulsive, owing to the severity, harshness and abruptness of their character. Whenever I read the play, it invariably calls forth a whirl of conflicting feelings and thoughts, and it is only some time afterwards, and by degrees that this deep agitation is followed by the tragic liberation and elevation of the soul, a feeling which is otherwise usually called forth directly by Shakspeare's tragedies. The reason of this I can discover only in the fact that, in 'Othello' the harshness of the death of human beauty and greatness maintains a decided predominance over what is soothing and conciliatory, whereas the latter ought likewise to be an essential element of tragedy. At all events, the shrill discords which, in this present case, appear to be heaped one upon the other, are not (as in the closing scene of 'Romeo and Juliet') resolved into a pleasing and elevating harmony, but only find their reconciliation indirectly, by thoughtful reflection and by comprehending all the several incidents in the idea upon which the drama is based. If this be the case and if my feeling has not deceived me, it would imply a want of tragic development and completion, and accordingly this drama—which Englishmen generally consider the greatest, on account of the simple and very clear motives in its construction—would have to be considered inferior to others of Shakspeare's tragedies.

In order to obtain a clear insight into this matter, in

order to comprehend the intention of the poet, the tragic pathos in Othello's fate, and thereby the nature of the tragedy, it is above all things important to understand Othello's character. For tragedy is distinguished from comedy, also by the fact that the tragic pathos, the suffering and death of the hero, must arise out of the character, the powers and disposition, the passions and impulses of the hero, even though with the aid of external circumstances; in comedy, it is the very reverse, the play of chance and the complications of external circumstances unfold their whole power, and generally lead to results entirely different to what the dramatic personages, according to their characters, tendency, and sentiments, had intended.

First of all Othello is a born warrior, a *general*, a military genius; this is the peculiar gift by which he is pre-eminently distinguished. This fact the poet has so often and so repeatedly set forth, that great stress seems obviously to have been placed upon it; and indeed it contains the main clue for comprehending the whole tragedy. For as a warrior *par excellence*, Othello is not merely ambitious in the common sense of the word, *honour* rather necessarily and pre-eminently forms the basis of his personal existence, the condition by which alone he can fulfil his natural destiny, and satisfy the thirst of his genius for performing heroic deeds and enduring heroic sufferings. Pedantic moralists, who would like to see their self-made laws imposed as oracles on human life, have indeed often enough maintained that honour is a mere phantom, a delusive possession of error and sin, upon which the moral man ought to turn his back. Honour, certainly, is this imaginary phantom when, in place of being employed as a means, it is made the absolute aim and end. In this case the person is not honour-loving but honour-seeking, and between the *love* of honour and the *thirst* for honour there is a very wide difference. The latter is the creature of sin, the perversion of a moral virtue into evil and ruin. The *love* of honour, however, is one and the same thing as a genuine moral sentiment, becoming in a man, and is combined with the duty to love one's neigh-

bour as oneself, therefore to devote one's energies and powers, doings and strivings to the welfare of humanity. For were there no honour among men, were there no external esteem, such as is due to every good member of human society, the sinews of man's energy would be cut asunder. Man, when standing by himself, is incapable, powerless; he can act only if others accept his doings and strivings, if, in esteem for his sentiments and his honest intentions, they co-operate with him. Honour is the indispensable bond between man's enterprise and the sphere of its activity. Herein, the love of honour has its moral justification, this is why dishonour, the want of all feeling of honour, is a moral disgrace. This is why Othello, when believing his honour to be destroyed, justly exclaims (iii. 3):

“Farewell the plumèd troops, and the big wars,
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner; and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!”

With the loss of his honour, his activity is destroyed, his strength broken. But Othello is not only honour-loving, his love of honour by becoming a passion, is also mixed with a thirst for honour. The former is indeed the determinating principle of his resolves and actions; he is indeed aware that its mimic, the thirst for honour, is no virtue, that war alone could make it this, *i.e.*, give it the appearance, the semblance of true honour. But even this mere semblance he will not have taken from him; his love of honour is clouded by a thirst for honour, his self-sacrificing activity for the general welfare is mixed with the desire for fame, with the selfishness of passion. Hence the restlessness, the vehemence, the violent mental agitation which takes possession of him at the first, faintest suspicion of Desdemona's infidelity, at the mere thought of his honour being affected.

Othello, however, not only possesses the virtues but the faults of a warrior. We are at once aware that from his seventh year he has associated only with soldiers, that war has been his instructor, and the camp his school. In

accordance with this he is cool and discreet. Iago says of him (iii. 4) :

“ I have seen the cannon,
When it hath blown his ranks into the air ;
And, like the devil, from his very arm
Puff'd his own brother ;—And can he be angry ?
Something of moment, then : I will go meet him :
There's matter in't indeed, if he be angry.”

This praise is no doubt honestly meant. Othello could not be the great general he is acknowledged to be, without that imperturbable calmness and firmness of character, that presence of mind which is but a form of self-control, and without which it is impossible to have control over others, over the endless variety of incalculable accidents, fluctuations of time and incidents of war, in other words, without which it is impossible to possess the knowledge and the tact of a general. But, as Iago also intimates, it is only in danger that he is cold-blooded. Without this lever to his equilibrium he is not only severe, rough, and hasty, but also at times passionate and violent. He shows himself to be so, in his conduct towards the intoxicated Cassio, which forms the beginning of the whole catastrophe.

But Othello is not only a warrior, he is also a man. Amid the storms of war, amid the thunder of guns, amid hatred and strife, and love of slaughter, he has preserved the more tender and nobler feelings which alone make a man, he has preserved a frank, loving heart which does not ask for actions and merits, but for kindness of disposition and sentiment. He is capable of *loving* in the fullest and highest sense of the word, he is capable of admiring not only beauty of soul, grace, amiability and nobleness of mind, but has also a desire lovingly and longingly to make them his own. This is unmistakable in his relation to Desdemona ; his love for her is of the purest and noblest kind, genuine manly love, centred in the inmost nature and true worth of the beloved object, in the imperishable beauty of her true womanliness. He is, indeed, by no means blind to the personal charms of Desdemona, but this external beauty alone would not have won him, it might rather have repelled him in his

courtship, for he is aware how little of it he himself has to put in the scales. Desdemona herself, therefore, has, as it were, to challenge his heart, she has to make the first advance. Only when he sees that it is not his exterior, but his inmost nature that has made an impression upon her heart—in her true womanliness of mind, being indifferent to his outward appearance, and capable of appreciating the true value of the man—it is, then only, that he gives himself up to her in all the fervour and fire of unimpaired manhood. Nay, this fire even rises above the flames of his ambition, and outshines the bright rays of his heroism. His are not mere words, it is genuine, deep feeling when—in the greatest misery at the supposed certainty of Desdemona's infidelity,—he calls out almost in madness (iv. 2):

“Had it pleas'd heaven
To try me with affliction; had he rain'd
All kind of sores, and shames, on my bare head;
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips;
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience: but, alas! to make me
The fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow and moving finger at,—
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well:
But there where I have garner'd up my heart:
Where either I must live, or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!
Or keep it as a cistern, for foul toads
To knot and gender in! Turn thy complexion there,
Patience, thou young and rose-lipp'd cherubin!
Ay, there, look grim as hell!”

As Othello, here, places love far above fame and honour, so he carries his loving disposition, his sensitive heart into his work and the fulfilment of his duties. Cassio is not merely his subordinate, but his friend, and even while enraged at his misdemeanour, while ordering his punishment, he assures him of his love, of his continued friendship. Nay, Iago's complaint of Cassio's having been preferred to him, does not seem altogether unfounded. At least his assertion (i. 1) that Cassio is a mere 'counter-caster' who 'never set a squadron in the field, nor the

division of a battle knows more than a spinster,' is nowhere contradicted. Even though the envy which comes from Iago's lips may have exaggerated his want of merit and its practical proof, still Cassio's being appointed lieutenant in preference to him, most distinctly shows the power which personal love and esteem have exercised over Othello's will, and is set forth as a fundamental feature of his character. And he who knows how to love is also truly worthy of love. Although Othello does not possess any external grace, still his inner nature is nevertheless described as thoroughly noble, frank and open; he gives himself up to his love without the least suspicion: hence he is an amiable character. Where the malicious, hateful Iago is speaking in soliloquy, he will, no doubt, be accepted as a trustworthy witness; for notwithstanding his utter worthlessness, he is a keen, acute judge of human character. And it is Iago himself who says of Othello (i. 3):

"The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so."

And in another passage (ii. 1):

"The Moor—howbeit that I endure him not—
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature;
And, I dare think, he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband."

This simple and incontrovertible testimony, coming as it does from the heart of his bitterest enemy, must silence every unfavourable view that speaks ill of Othello's character.

But Othello is not merely a soldier, not merely a man in the better sense of the word, he has yet another characteristic peculiarity, he is a Moor. The extremely violent, passionate temperament of the negroes is a well-known fact, and it is equally well known that, to overcome the nature of one's temperament is the most difficult task set by moral law; to subdue it *completely* is absolutely impossible. By this, however, we do not wish to maintain it to be an impossibility that a negro cannot, at the same time, be a truly noble and morally great man; examples of genuine nobility of mind, of sublime self-control, and the possibility of becoming reconciled to, and even loving an enemy, are not

of unfrequent occurrence even among slaves.. In Othello also this heat of blood, this glow of passion is innate. Othello also—whose character occupies morally so high a position, whose mind has so great a strength of will and is so highly gifted—has doubtless had to fight and struggle hard to overcome his natural temperament, his innate weaknesses. That he has succeeded to a very great extent is proved by Iago's words, as well as by the high and general esteem in which he is held by the Doge and Senate of Venice, by the people of Cyprus and by all his military associates, not only on account of his genius as a commander, but on account of his virtue; this is repeatedly insisted upon by the poet (for instance, in Acts i. 1; ii. 1; iv. 1). And yet he is by no means perfect master of his Moorish nature. The power of his self-control would have sufficed to have resisted any individual misfortunes, had they been ever so heavy; it is no over-estimation of himself when, in the already-quoted passage he says, that he should have found 'a drop of patience' in his soul for the deepest misery, and have even borne the ruin of his honour, and scorn, and disgrace. But when the whole of his inmost being, when the deepest foundation of his existence, when the basis of his character is shaken, then his self-control breaks down also, and from its ruins there bursts forth the unfettered passionateness and destructive violence of his Moorish nature.

And yet it is a singular mistake when A. W. Schlegel, and with him most critics, wish us to see in Othello only the Moor who, because a Moor, has unavoidably fallen into the blind passionateness, the jealousy and the thirst for revenge peculiar to his race; it is also a singular mistake that they make the brutal ferocity of the common negro the essence of Othello's character, and degrade his virtues into more artificial habits, mere empty appearances. This view is opposed not only to those express and valid testimonies which the poet has put into Iago's mouth, but at once destroys the tragic pathos of the tragedy. Or, are we to regard it as tragic that the Moor invariably remains the Moor, branded with Cain's mark on his forehead, despised and rejected, because he is not and never can be a white man? Are we to conceive it as tragic that a wild beast, hitherto controlled externally and freed from its

bonds by malice and carelessness, should, in blind fury, tear friend and foe and finally himself to pieces? Verily such a predestination and its malice might produce horror and disgust, but never tragic pity, or that tragic fear and purification of the mind, which, since the days of Aristotle, have been acknowledged to be the aim and object of tragedy. If Othello, in place of precipitating from a *really* high state of human virtue and greatness of soul, had from the beginning been a common negro, from whose hidden coarseness and ferocity the mask of virtue had been torn in the development of the catastrophe, then the tragedy would be devoid of all foundation, the whole construction of the edifice would be torn from its very base. Desdemona would be an ordinary, immature girl who had allowed herself to be deceived by a hypocrite, a braggard of virtue; Iago would be the only one who saw things clearly, he alone would be in the right, and we should have to thank him that, through his worthless artifices, he had brought to light the true nature of the beast. The Senate of Venice, Cassio, and all the others—in their esteem for Othello—would be deluded fools!

Schlegel may have thought that Shakspeare made his hero a Moor, or retained his Moorish extraction—in accordance with the novel of Giraldi Cinthio, from which he probably took his subject—only in order by this means to explain Othello's mode of action, his blind jealousy and vindictiveness, and to make the action proceed from the innate nature and thus from the hero's own individuality. But even granted that jealousy and vindictiveness are among the original fundamental features of Othello's character—which in truth is not the case—still there was no need of Moorish extraction to have these qualities of mind as motives. Even at the present day there are plenty of Italians who, under similar circumstances, would act precisely like Othello. Shakspeare's artistic motives have a deeper root, and lie in the inmost nature of his art itself. His object is not merely to justify Othello's Moorish ferocity and rage—which in truth he nowhere displays—the poet's chief reason for placing his African origin prominently forward, is to exhibit his moral greatness in its most glorious light. Othello, before

he could attain to the eminent stage of human virtue which he occupies, had to overcome, not only his general weakness and general proneness to evil, but in addition, the violence of his temperament, the passionateness of his race. His having succeeded in this, shows the eminent power of his mind and will, and this again explains how it is that, in spite of the stain of his birth, he has been able to obtain such great authority in Venice. And this heroic greatness, which is not merely warlike and based upon innate talent, but a truly moral greatness as well, makes his fall all the more tragic. The nobler the hero, the higher his position, the more deeply are we affected by his fall, whereas the downfall of wickedness and vice, of coarse vulgarity or even of brutal rage and ferocity, leaves us in a state of indifference. But in addition to this, Desdemona's character, also, only receives its true significance through the fact that, in spite of Othello's repulsive ugliness, in spite of the contempt attaching to his race, she nevertheless recognises his high inner worth, and is able to love him warmly and deeply. On the other hand, she cannot be regarded as altogether innocent of the terrible fate that befalls her; its tragic character would offend our moral feelings, and thus destroy the tragic impression were it so terribly to contradict the so-called poetical, that is, the ideal justice, which indeed is often difficult to recognise, but which, in fact, is an indestructible desire and necessity in our ethical nature. Desdemona's principal fault, however, consists in her having deceived her noble, affectionate father, and married the man she loves, against his knowledge and consent. And this choice of hers—which is in perfect accordance with her character and is otherwise so fully justified—her father, owing to his own esteem for Othello, can again disapprove of only on account of his African origin. Lastly, Iago's whole plan, which he himself often enough declares is supported by the double supposition that, on the one hand, in face of such an incongruity of outward grace and amiability, no marriage could for long hold good, and that, on the other, Othello himself, owing to this very consideration, would the more readily be made suspicious. Thus we see Othello's very Moorish origin is so deeply inter-

woven with the chief motives of the whole tragic development, that criticism is in no need of any untrue imputations to find profound artistic wisdom in this circumstance, which, on the one hand, appears striking, and on the other, a matter of indifference.

But, in fact, it is not only untrue that Othello's bloody deeds are supposed to be the bursting forth of his common nature, of his innate brutal ferocity, even the accusation of the blind jealousy and vindictiveness which are laid to his charge, is a thoroughly false imputation. For we all can claim the name of morality only according to the self-control we possess over our natural desires, emotions and passions. We all bear within us the germs of vindictiveness, of jealousy and of ambition; there is no vice in this world to which each one of us has not some natural predisposition. But, even in this the Moor Othello is completely like most of us, inasmuch as his virtue cannot withstand formidable temptation, that he loses his self-control when all the props of his existence—at least of his consciousness—have broken down. He differs from us only in so far as in his downfall there bursts forth a more hasty, more violent and mightier passion than usually belongs to the northern nature of the Englishman or German. For this very reason he is pre-eminently suited for a tragic hero. However, that jealousy is not actually part of his nature, not one of the *fundamental* features of his character, that in truth he possesses only as much of it as all men, is attested not only by Iago's already quoted praise of his 'free and open nature'—which plainly absolves him from any tendency to suspicion, the presupposition of jealousy—it is corroborated not only by his own testimony (iii. 3), not only by the words spoken in face of his voluntary death and attested by it (v. 2):

"Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well;
Of one, not easily jealous, but, being wrought," etc.

but is above all proved by his own conduct. If Shakespeare had wished to make jealousy the centre of his

character, why does Othello nowhere give utterance to it, before he is excited and spurred on to it by Iago? Not a word of anxiety, of uneasiness, or of suspicion passes his lips, not a thought of the possibility of Desdemona's infidelity is in his heart. Even Iago's assertions are, by no means, trusted at once, Othello demands proofs, striking, irresistible proofs. It is only when he thinks that he has the evidence clearly in his hands, that there first springs forth that jealousy which had hitherto existed but as a germ; being, however, matured by his hot blood, by his excitable feelings and the glowing power of his imagination, it spreads like wild-fire. But even these proofs are not uncertain, equivocal testimonies and turned into proofs by mere suspicion;—I should like to see the man—in Italy, in the wealthiest commercial city of the world, and at a time of the corruption of female beauty such as is described by Iago (iii. 3, and ii. 1), and reflected in Emilia's loose talk (iv. 3)—as cleverly and cunningly belied by a friend and military comrade (whom all the world considers a man of honour) and seeing the token of his love in the hands of a young, handsome, amiable man, and whose doubts, moreover, are strengthened by the warm interest of his wife in her supposed lover, who would not become suspicious, and give an ear to the whisperings of the demon of jealousy! In fact, the man who would not find this to be an adequate proof of infidelity would have, in Arcadian simplicity, to consider women angels. But the man who has reasons for being jealous, is himself not actually jealous. The nature of the passion consists rather in the fact that it invariably seeks for something where nothing is to be found. The passion of pain and anger about actual infidelity is as justifiable as that excited by any other moral offence committed by the one we love. Nevertheless Othello's pain and rage have externally the appearance of jealousy, partly on account of the unusual vehemence with which he expresses himself, partly because the proofs are, as yet, proofs only for *him*, in reality no proofs, or because it is his misfortune to be inexpressibly belied and deceived. Hence, taken objectively he does certainly appear jealous, but in himself, subjectively he is not.

It is much the same as regards Othello's vindictiveness. In the first place it is again Iago who testifies to his being of a 'loving, noble nature.' Now a noble loving person cannot possibly be revengeful, that is, the spirit of revenge, like all other weaknesses, may indeed lie in his nature as a germ, but it cannot be one of his characteristic peculiarities, nor one of the fundamental features, and fundamental motives of his character; this would diametrically contradict the love and nobility of his mind. In the second place, how forbearing and conciliatory (i. 2) Othello is to Brabantio! Although the latter heaps upon him the severest and most unjust abuse, yet Othello answers him with gentleness and respect. In like manner he bears the mortification of his recall from Cyprus with calmness and resignation.* In both cases we rather perceive a manly pride, a noble dignity such as is usually coupled with true greatness, which, being conscious of its own worth, overlooks unjust abuse; nowhere do we find a trace of all the signs which testify to the risings of a revengeful spirit. Hence the seed of revenge also, shoots forth in his breast only after he is completely estranged from himself. Love and honour were the very foundations of his life. In Desdemona he had found his own inmost self; in believing her lost, he loses himself, her infidelity makes him untrue to himself. Very just therefore is Desdemona's lament (iii. 4):

"My lord is not my lord; nor should I know him
Were he in favour, as in humour, alter'd."

Very just is Lodovico's astonished enquiry (iv. 1):

"Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all-in-all sufficient?—Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
Could neither graze nor pierce?"

* This recall, a very subordinate and secondary incident in the action, does certainly appear 'unmotivated,' but princes, doges and senates are, in fact, in the habit of occasionally acting without a motive, that is, arbitrarily. Desdemona's exclamation 'Trust me, I'm glad on't,' which escapes her on hearing the news, is by no means 'unmotivated' or unnatural; it is rather very natural that she is not happy in Cyprus and that she longs for Venice, where she hopes that Othello may recover his health, when away from his present position and surroundings.

Very justly does he, in the end, say of himself (v. 2):

“That’s he that *was* Othello; here I am.”

In fact, he has become an entirely different man, he no longer is Othello. But, as the poet most emphatically states, this change is not—as Schlegel puts it—a relapse into his own brutal nature, but the destruction of his truly noble nature, the collapse of the glorious edifice into a desolate ruin ‘for foul toads to knot and gender in.’ Accordingly the just pain and rage which rouses his whole nature, his ardent feelings, and excited imagination into a violent state of passion, is certainly mixed with a feeling of revenge; but still his revenge has even a nobler motive than mere delight in the sufferings and ruin of its victim.

It is only when he supposes that love is lost to him, when he supposes himself betrayed by his wife and friend, when he is desolate and unable to love any other being, it is then only that, with the blind despair of a shipwrecked man, he clutches hold of the last possession he has kept afloat, his sole remaining property—*honour*; this, at least, he intends to save for himself. His honour, as he thinks, demands the sacrifice of the lives of Desdemona and Cassio. The ideas of honour in those days, especially in Italy, inevitably required the death of the faithless wife as well as the death of the adulterer. Othello, therefore, regards it as his duty to comply with these ideas, and accordingly, it is certainly no lie when, in act v. 2, he calls himself ‘an honourable murderer,’ doing ‘naught in hate, but all in honour.’ In fact, if Desdemona and Cassio had really committed the crime, his revenge would, from his point of view, have been regarded only as just and necessary to save his honour; consequently he cannot be called revengeful in the sense of *thirsting* for revenge. Even in regard to this point, therefore, it may be said: for us, taken objectively, he certainly does appear revengeful; in himself, subjectively, he is not. At least, revenge is as little the actual motive of his actions as jealousy. This is self-evident from the external way in which he takes his revenge. Common thirst for revenge would have thought only of increasing the sufferings of its victim, of adding to its own satisfaction. But how

touching, on the other hand, is Othello's appeal to Desdemona to pray and to confess her sins to heaven, so that he may not kill her soul with her body! Here, at the moment of the most intense excitement, in the desperate mood of a murderer, his *love* still breaks forth, and we again see the indestructible nobility of his soul.*

Once more Schlegel's misunderstanding is inconceivable, and can only have arisen from the fact that the poet's intention completely escaped him. It is all the more inconceivable, for it is as clear as can be that all the accusations which he casts upon Othello's character do not apply to him but to Iago, and that it was Iago himself who—according to Shakspeare's evident intention—was to form the diametrical contrast and to be the foil to Othello's heroic character. Iago is jealous in the commonest sense of the word; for his suspicion as to the fidelity of his wife is pure imagination; he himself has his doubts about it, his keen sense shows him how untrue are his mere suppositions; but his heart clings to them, for innate predisposition to evil will not let itself be controlled by mere discernment. Further, he is revengeful, fearfully revengeful. For upon mere suspicion, and because—through Othello's interest—Cassio has been made lieutenant in preference to himself, he persecutes both to the very death, and rejoices at the heartrending misery he causes. He—although a complete stranger to the true sense of honour—is greedy of honour, ambitious in the worst sense of the word. To him, honour is that mere semblance, that vain phantom of conceited fools, which he heartily despises, but which he pursues because it is a means of satisfying his further desires, of helping him to obtain power and wealth, and dominion over men, and because he requires occupation with external objects in order to avoid communion with himself. Further, his is a common brutal nature which hides its coarseness and ferocity only so long as circumstances require it, and the dissimulation of his own intentions demands, which, however bursts forth in a fearful manner as soon as fortune turns her back upon him. This is distinctly seen by the self-destructive rage in

* My interpretation of Othello's character is perfectly agreed to by C. Hebler (*Aufsätze über Shakspeare*, Bern, 1865, p. 26 ff.); in all essential points also by Gervinus.

which he stabs his own wife. This act has, it is true, been declared wanting in motive, and opposed to Iago's character—considering his otherwise so cold and collected nature, which always possesses control over self, always calculates between cause and effect—but, such critics, in their realistic blindness, and abiding only with what is palpable, have overlooked the fact that a hate and thirst for revenge, such as burned in Iago's breast, is only explicable, can only arise from a very high degree of passionate desire and passionate excitability; they have also overlooked the fact that Iago—convicted by Emilia's testimony, not indeed of the perpetrated crime, but yet of the most infamous lies and intrigues—has not only to expect punishment, but (which affects him more) that his position, his military career and its ambitious object (to obtain Othello's place), all his hopes and plans, all that made life of any value to him, are ruined at one blow, by his own wife. This he sees at a glance; this affects the very source of his will and actions, his passionate thirst of revenge; this shakes his self-control, which had its support only in the pursuit of the plans and projects which ever floated before his imagination. When these are completely destroyed, his self-control breaks down also; he no longer considers it worth his trouble to master his feelings, and therefore gives free reins to his rage and spirit of revenge. Accordingly, it is Iago, and not Othello, that is the whitewashed, virtuous hypocrite, whose morality is but a semblance and an aping, the mere artificial production of his calculating wickedness. In every respect the very reverse of Othello, reserved, cautious, spiteful, vulgarly egotistical, without a spark of true nobility of mind, he resembles him only in energy of character, in martial courage, in firmness and consistency of will. It is these few good qualities, together with his art of dissembling, which have formed the intimate bond subsisting between him and Othello, and which the poet has, as it were, conferred upon him to counterbalance the more devilish than human wickedness of his nature. There is also (as Gervinus ingeniously observes) a faint stirring of his indeed completely suppressed, but not yet dead conscience, in the fact that he betrays an involuntary inclination to make out that he has justifiable reasons for his actions, and that his calum-

nies were not mere inventions, but attested by actual sins perpetrated in secret by the persons in question. Nevertheless it is a fault of the drama, even though an excusable one, that the conspicuous worthlessness of this character is not sufficiently motivated. Such unheard of wickedness, far surpassing the ordinary human standard, ought in some way to be explained by the history of the individual, by special circumstances, by the general character of the times. Otherwise the moral abhorrence prevails over the ever vivid appearance of the psychological truth of the character; one is inclined to doubt whether such a man ever existed or could exist, and this consequently also throws a doubt upon the inner possibility of Othello's terrible fate, and this doubt, again, necessarily disturbs the impression of the tragedy.

We have a similar but less striking contrast in the two female characters. *Desdemona* is one of those graceful figures of Shakspeare's who is sketched in a few light and fine touches, as her nature demands, but, nevertheless, irresistibly wins all hearts. *Desdemona* lives entirely in the feeling of love and in its ideal view of life; the present vanishes from her in the dream of a future in which all mankind are as they should be, in which every germ is destined to blossom and bear fruit, and everything good is to arise from its stunted existence into perfect reality. All things appear to her, as it were, glorified in the rosy light of true, even though but internal goodness and beauty, for she looks at all things with the eyes of love. Accordingly she is as unsuspecting, as confidently devoted, as easy to deceive as Othello. Her love, however, is less a passion, than deep, intense feeling; it is not the loving youthful enthusiasm which so often finds itself deceived, hers is pure, genuine gold, lying in the deepest foundation of her own character, as well as in the inmost nature of her beloved. This is manifest, as already intimated, in the first place and above all in her choice of a husband, who, like Othello, is not only a Moor, not only externally ugly, but also without the brightness of youth, without the arts of gallantry, without refinement of manners and grace of speech, and that she can find all this counterbalanced by the worth of his character, his

heroic genius and his moral greatness. In order to throw the fullest light upon Desdemona's choice—this love, which forms the centre of her character and the basis of the whole tragedy, and which is by no means, as has been most unreasonably supposed, founded merely upon her sensitive imagination, excited by Othello's account of his doings and adventures—the poet, in the character of Roderigo, gives us a rival to the favoured Moor. Desdemona is not only extremely amiable, talented, beautiful and of high birth, but she is also courted by a young, noble Venetian, who loves her to distraction, and whose faults and transgressions, as it seems, arise only out of his blind passion for her—mere imagination would not be able to hold its own against such tempting reality. And yet she chooses the Moor—nay, she chooses him not only by refusing every other offer, not only in direct contrast to the manner of ordinary girls, who allow themselves to be deceived by external appearances and vain glitter, not only in contradiction to the general contempt which rests upon Othello's origin, but even against the knowledge and consent of her own father.

This circumstance is one of great importance, for it not only first gives Desdemona's character its true significance, but it is the foundation of the tragic pathos which pervades the whole drama. Like Romeo and Juliet, Othello and especially Desdemona, have transgressed against the inviolable right of family, against the paternal authority from whose will the child cannot sever itself, without at the same time severing itself from the protecting bond of morality. Hence both are wrong, but are wrong only in so far as they are right. For, on the other hand, Desdemona's love is thoroughly of a moral character, her choice thoroughly justified, because it not only perfectly agrees with her own inmost nature, but also with all the demands of moral law; for moral law demands us to choose not according to the blind lusts of the heart and the charms of the senses, but according to what is true and eternal, that is, according to the moral worth of the person. Desdemona's love, therefore, has as much right towards its defender as towards its accuser; the right is violated by the right, is in contradiction with itself. Such collisions are

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manure to the soil upon which tragedy thrives; characters, which have to live through and to solve this inward contradiction of human existence, are pre-eminently tragic characters. That Othello is one, must be self-evident from the fundamental features of his nature as described above. But Desdemona, also, in spite of her tender womanliness, in spite of her loving submissiveness and devotion, is an enduring, strong nature, of an independence bordering upon obstinacy, emotional, energetic, true to herself and capable of great impulses and actions. It was just the heroic deeds and fate of Othello which won him her love. To this love she sacrifices her filial obedience and thereby calls forth the demon of tragedy; for the sake of this love she bears with her father's anger, the bad repute of the world and the hardships of a soldier's life; without consideration she gives herself up to the man she loves; she no longer wishes to be a daughter, a Venetian, or a patrician her only wish is to be fully and completely Othello's wife. But even towards her husband she acts obstinately in regard to what she perceives to be right and just; she exposes herself even to his anger, in order to carry out her will. This is seen from her conduct in pleading for Cassio, whose case she takes up with a warmth which might easily become suspicious; however, she evidently acts in this way only because, in her innocence and purity of heart, she is completely ignorant of the vice of which she is accused, and accordingly is also unaware of how to avoid even the appearance of it. She is led to this indiscretion only by her ardent, loving, sympathetic heart, her gratitude towards one who helped to bring about her happiness. In like manner she carelessly loses the fatal handkerchief, only because she is wholly taken up with her anxiety about Othello's feigned headache. Lastly, even on her deathbed and with her last breath, she is guilty of a falsehood, but only to save her beloved from shame and punishment. Her faults, consequently, are but the reverse sides of her virtues; nevertheless they remain faults, faults of a genuine tragic nature, because, in fact, they are founded upon human greatness and nobility of mind.

Emilia, as Iago's wife and Desdemona's maid, stands in

a similar relation to the latter, as Iago to Othello; and yet the contrast is, however, again conceived from a different point of view. Emilia is not a so-called bad character, she has nothing of Iago's wickedness, and jealousy, and revenge, nothing of vulgar egotism, the primary motive of all vice; she may rather be called good-natured, loves and honours her mistress with genuine devotion, and has a certain natural instinct about human nobility of soul. But she is in a high degree frivolous, weak, and senseless; one of the great class of persons who, it is true, at the bottom of their hearts mean to do good, but who, governed by circumstances, and led astray by false friends and counsellors, do that which is bad. She considers women—herself not excepted—as morally weak, but men as weaker still, consoles herself, however, with the thought that it cannot be otherwise. She is, indeed, faithful to her husband but, as she herself says, would commit adultery 'for all the whole world,' that is, virtue to her is not inviolable, moral purity, free and sufficient in itself, but, as is generally the case, half virtue, half vice, dependent upon good fortune and chance. This is why she does not look very closely into matters, and is not very scrupulous about a small sin. This explains how it is that she could form a marriage—which from the very beginning was no marriage—with a man whom she far surpassed in goodness of heart; how also she can, to a certain extent, love him, comply with his wishes, live by his side without, however, actually being his, without knowing him, without having a notion of his true character; and lastly how, with true heroism she defends the innocence of her mistress and even defies death, but yet can rob and impose upon that mistress, and be herself deceived by her husband.

By the side of both married couples stands a friend; on the one hand Cassio, on the other Roderigo. Cassio, as is self-evident from his being Othello's friend, is a thoroughly noble, amiable character; and he is described as such, not only by Othello, Desdemona and Emilia, but also by Iago, as long as the latter considers it necessary to honour truth. However, Cassio's virtue is wanting in the earnestness and strictness of the law, it has the soft forms of a polished,

luxurious age, it is governed by that weakly good nature which considers it a duty to be complaisant and yielding to others. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Cassio, although knowing what a bad effect wine has upon him, is nevertheless induced to drink. This explains his relation to Bianca, which is thoroughly imbued with the pestilential atmosphere of common sensuality. In the first case he is too compliant towards his supposed friend, in the second too yielding to a girl whose only merit is her true love for him. Nevertheless he is not unworthy of Othello's friendship and Desdemona's intercession. His deep, genuine contrition in regard to his indiscretion, as well as his sincere esteem and gratitude towards his friend and his protectress, prove that the purity of his heart is but dimmed, not entirely lost.

Roderigo, on the other hand, is a violent man, a slave to his passions and desires, and, therefore, immoral, not like Iago, bad from wickedness or low calculating egotism, but from a want of all self-control. His glowing passion for Desdemona so enthrals his whole being that Iago need only flatter it to get him completely into his net. It makes him both blind and deaf to the awkward manner in which Iago—who, in his case, does not even take the trouble to exert his intelligence and acuteness—abuses him and his purse; it makes him a spendthrift, a fool, a criminal; it drives him to deeds, in which a disgraceful ruin proves his just retribution.

Old Brabantio, finally, is but an introductory, subordinate figure, existing only as a motive. He is merely the representative of paternal power, of the family relation, much in the same way as the Duke and Senate of Venice, Gratiano and Lodovico as their ambassadors, Montano as governor of Cyprus, together with the nobles, officers and sailors, etc., represent the social relations, the condition of the state, the character of the people and the spirit of the age. They, as it were, form the background upon which the whole picture is depicted, and which, though only in a general way, exercises a determinating influence upon the colour, delineation and composition of the whole. All of these figures, therefore, do not require any further characterisation, because, in fact, they are not individual characters.

The *action*, the substance of the drama, is to some extent the result of this arrangement of the characters. Two men like Othello and Iago cannot proceed along by the side of one another, without coming into conflict. Othello, although thoroughly considering Iago to be a man of honour, nevertheless prefers the less deserving Cassio; an ominous instinct, an unconscious feeling keeps him from the former and draws him to the latter. The deep, internal difference between the two men is the cause of Cassio's preferment which arouses Iago's envy against Othello's happiness and renown, is the foundation of his hatred of Othello, and thus becomes the chief motive of the whole action. His jealousy also, is not only rooted deeply in his own character, but is doubtless also aroused by Othello's frank and unconstrained behaviour towards Emilia, as well as by her frivolous disposition. This sets the whole machinery of the action in motion. For Roderigo's love for Desdemona is no motive to Iago, merely an additional advantage, a means for furthering his plans, which he uses as well as he can, and casts aside when used. On the other hand, Othello's and Desdemona's characters, the deep, internal agreement of their natures, as necessarily results in their mutual, genuine, honest love, as Iago's and Emilia's characters result in but a partial marriage. Lastly, it has already been intimated that Iago's whole plan is based upon the fundamental elements of Othello's nature, partly upon his utter want of suspicion, which has no idea of the craft, of the hypocrisy, wickedness and cunning of an Iago, partly, however, also upon his choleric, passionate temperament. In this he everywhere receives assistance from Cassio's weakness, Roderigo's delusion, Desdemona's kindness of heart and amiable thoughtlessness, and lastly, from Emilia's frivolous compliancy. Without these essential elements in the characters of the dramatic personages, Iago's dastardly trick, even though ever so cleverly planned, would of necessity have failed; without them it would never have come to a tragic catastrophe.

The chief motives of the action consequently lie in the characters of the persons represented, and yet the tragic catastrophe arises only indirectly, *not directly*, out of the

disposition and the mode of action of the tragic heroes. The construction of the piece, in this, differs distinctly from that of Shakspeare's other tragedies. In 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Hamlet,' 'King Lear,' and 'Macbeth,' nay, even in his historical tragedies, the poet in the first place exhibits a certain position of affairs, he describes the circumstances, relations and situations, as well as the characters, of the surrounding persons among whom his tragic heroes live; in other words, he first lays the foundation upon which the edifice is to be raised, but whose construction it is directly to affect only in so far as the fortunes of his heroes proceed, it is true, from this foundation, but, in the first place and directly, from their own characters, their own actions, their freedom and self-determination. Thus, to give but one example: in 'Romeo and Juliet' the furious hatred between the Capulets and Montagues does, indeed, form the basis of the tragic catastrophe, but this relation is a positive one to the two lovers, they therefore are aware of it, and, if they nevertheless follow the impulse of their passionate love—out of which alone their tragic ruin is developed—then it is their own will or the necessary consequence of their own characters. The relations and circumstances as well as the secondary persons who surround them, certainly do encourage it, but the primary cause of their fate is nevertheless the state of their own minds and their mode of action. It is different with our present drama. Othello does not know of Iago's hatred, Iago's revengeful spirit, his wickedness and cunning; he does not see the cliffs upon which his life is to be wrecked, hence he cannot arrange his intentions and actions in accordance with them. His mode of action, therefore, does not only, not arise from his freedom, but directly, not even from his character; it is rather caused by an inconceivable imposition practised upon him by another person; without this imposition there is in Othello's whole being not even the smallest corner from which such monstrous deeds could have burst forth. It is only this imposition which first, as it were, breaks down his whole character, and turns the lowest portion of it uppermost. That he allows himself to be deceived arises, it is true, from his own individuality, but only partially.

For, on the other hand, the deceit is so cunningly contrived, so favoured by circumstances, that even the most cautious and most circumspect person would have been deceived by it. In short, the distinguishing peculiarity of our drama consists in its being a tragedy of *intrigue*, whereas all Shakespeare's other tragedies are rather tragedies of *character*.

This distinction, which has long been recognised in the domain of comedy, has hitherto not found any place in the æsthetic criticism of tragedy, owing to the very good reason, that in reality the predominance of intrigue is opposed to the nature of tragedy. Intrigue, because invariably based upon the special objects of a single individual, necessarily has the stamp of accident and caprice. If, therefore, it is made the lever of the action, the primary cause of the tragic catastrophe, the tragedy loses its character of grandeur and sublimity, it is precipitated from the region of a higher necessity, of a fate—which indeed lies in the inmost nature of man himself, and proceeds from it, but then overpowers and masters him—into the lower sphere of everyday life, in which only the limited interests and resolves of single individuals mutually combat and outwit one another. The downfall of human greatness and beauty, which is not founded upon its own immediate weakness or one-sidedness, but, though not altogether yet chiefly, occasioned by the cunning and power of the evil which opposes it—is something revolting; it offends the human sense of justice, and calls forth a doubt as regards the moral order of the world; it disturbs the impression of the tragic pathos, because it places the contradiction of human existence in the sharpest dissonance, without justifying its solution, *i.e.*, without exhibiting the elevating and conciliatory power of all human sufferings.

From the predominance of intrigue, it follows as a matter of course that chance also plays an important part, and that in a certain sense it assumes the character of intrigue. For chance is, in fact, but *objective* caprice, the caprice of *subjective* chance; both correspond with one another because they are internally of one nature. Now, chance is, indeed, as little to be excluded from tragedy as intrigue; both are essential elements of human life, and, therefore, have a perfect right to be represented in all

human actions and fortunes. And yet it is only in the field of comedy that they have the right of being a *principal power* in the dramatic development, they may *predominate* only in comedy. In tragedy, on the other hand, they must be employed only as an additional means to further the development, or as the echo of the outer world, which merely answers to the hero's disposition and mode of action, whereas the actual cause of the tragic fate must lie in the character and actions of the hero himself. Regarded in this light, chance—as we have already seen in 'Romeo and Juliet'—represents, so to say, the invisible hand of Providence which leads the tragic complication to its necessary goal; used in this way it can produce the greatest tragic effect. In 'Othello,' on the other hand, the catastrophe is first introduced and occasioned by chance. Othello, 'the noble nature whom passion could not shake,' who, in fact, is vulnerable only in the one point, in his love for Desdemona, is first plunged into the heat of passion by Iago's villainy and by the play of chance which favours it, and is thus thrown out of the centre of his existence and brought to ruin. The first accident is the circumstance of Desdemona losing her handkerchief—which is as much accident as carelessness—the second is that Emilia finds the handkerchief, the third, that Cassio gives it to Bianca, to have the embroidery copied, the fourth, that Othello sees it in Cassio's hand, the fifth, that Bianca happens to be at hand to help in deceiving Othello by Cassio's conduct in his conversation with Iago—it is all these accidents which convince Othello of the certainty of Desdemona's infidelity and which thus effect the complete ruin of his character. They are, therefore, pre-eminently the levers of the action. Of course, on the other hand, it is, indeed, highly tragic that human virtue is not even able to hold its own against blind chance and common intrigue; but it is tragic only on condition that it is founded upon the insufficiency of the power of the good itself. If, however, the powers of evil are called forth only by accident and intrigue, if, accordingly, the moral force is broken only so far that it is no longer able to defend itself, then the tragic pathos is carried beyond itself, up to a point where it becomes converted into what is hideous and horrible.

The chief motives of the action—which accordingly lie but partly in the characters of the dramatic personages, for the most part in the outward accidental circumstances,—in our present drama again naturally determine the *composition* of the piece, and, moreover, in the first place the external composition, that is, the arrangement of the separate scenes, the development of the characters in a definite succession of actions and situations, and the order in which the incidents of the action are presented to the spectator. Beauty of composition—like every other formal beauty—demands, above all things, harmony, clearness, and design, that is, it demands that the final aim of the action, the point to which the dramatic development finally leads, should, from beginning to end, be perceptible through the separate scenes, and that the characters, the action, and the intrigue should be developed as rapidly as clearly. This beauty of arrangement is exhibited in its highest perfection in ‘Othello.’ Even the exposition (the first scene of the first act) is a proof of this: Roderigo’s conversation with Iago not only makes us acquainted with the characters of both, but Iago’s hatred, jealousy, and revenge, at once reveal the chief motives of the whole action; whereas Brabantio’s appearance, his grief and rage—representing the right of the family which is violated in him—throws a dark tragic shadow over Othello’s and Desdemona’s love at the very commencement of the piece. The following scenes show us, partly Othello’s heroic figure in the zenith of his fame and renown, and partly describe his relation to Desdemona, the origin, the deep intensity, purity, and truth of their love, and then once more point to the storm which threatens their union. The second act shows us the threads out of which the complication of the third act is woven; first, Othello’s arrival in Cyprus, the description of his position in the still restless and agitated country, which again is the reason of his subsequent severity towards Cassio; then Iago’s opinions about the female sex, which throw a significant light upon Emilia’s character, as well as upon his marriage with her; thereupon we have the announcement of the festival, which forms the basis of the following and closing scene; lastly,

we have Cassio's drunkenness, his quarrel with Roderigo and Montano, his deposition, and Iago's advice to him to entreat Desdemona's intercession. The third act then weaves the given threads into the net, which Othello in his vehemence draws over his own head. It is easily seen that from this point everything runs on in a straight line, without digression, towards the one goal. It is only the second scene of the third act that seems to be a makeshift, which might well be dispensed with. But to make up for this the conclusion of the same act, as well as the fourth and fifth acts, are the more masterly in composition. With flash upon flash the tragic thunder-cloud relieves itself of its lightnings; with every word, with every turn of the representation, the course of the action makes an important advance; from every quarter we see but the one goal; and yet everything glides on in a natural flow without disturbance and force. As rapidly and naturally does the path, in the end, run down from its highest summit; the way in which Othello is undeceived, Iago unmasked and brought to confession, is a true masterpiece of dramatic development.*

And yet the external composition, were it ever so perfect, does not make the work of art an *organic* whole, it is rather only the *mechanical* side, the *external, formal* beauty of lines and outlines, extremely important for rendering the work intelligible and as regards effect, but a merit shared by every well devised piece of machinery. The drama first becomes a living *organism* by its *internal unity*, from which all its members and parts grow forth as from a fructified germ, and develop in accordance with their destiny, in which unity life has its inmost source, and necessarily determines the external form as well as the internal arrangement and formation of the whole. In other words, it first becomes a living organism, and thereby a work of art, by its *internal ideal* beauty, by the unity of the fundamental idea which penetrates the whole like a living

* In regard to the disturbing contradiction between the speech of Lodovico (act v. 2) and the 2nd scene of the 4th act—to which H. Köster has drawn attention, See his essay in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*, i. 139 ff.; I perfectly agree with the ingenious interpretation given by the author.

spirit, connects all the several parts internally, and first gives them the impress of consistency and of harmony.

In 'Othello' *conjugal love* and *fidelity*, i.e., the true nature of *marriage*, evidently forms the centre of the view of life represented, the ideal basis of the dramatic development. Like the love of betrothed persons, marriage is, even more so, one of the fundamental props of human civilization, an indispensable condition of all morality. It is itself a moral power, one of the forms in which the moral necessity manifests itself, and the violation of which, therefore, is necessarily followed by punishment and ruin. For it is the bond of the family union, the basis of all piety, of all obedience, of all morality; and the moral organism which every individual family ought to form, is again the condition of all moral order in church and state. The strength of marriage, however, lies in the purity of conjugal love, in the strictness of conjugal fidelity. Where the infidelity of husband and wife is sanctioned—as where polygamy is legally admissible—the necessary consequence is the infidelity of children to parents, of brothers to brothers; and thus the most indispensable foundation of human civilization breaks down within itself.

Now it is upon this basis that the poet places his heroes: Othello's and Desdemona's love is of the purest, most moral kind, their marriage is a full and genuine marriage, not merely based externally upon the word of a priest, but rooted deeply in the union of two equally noble hearts, and for this very reason it is their most precious treasure, the happiness and strength of their lives. And yet even this fundamental pillar of human existence, the prop to which morality ought to cling, to fortify and to strengthen, breaks down within itself, when the ground upon which it stands begins to totter, when self-control gives way under the weight of impulses and passions; even this most precious treasure turns into mischief and ruin when torn asunder from the organic connection of the whole moral order of the universe, when placed in contradiction with other moral forces and wasted by error and delusion. To give a living picture of this state of things, but at the same time to show us how the soul of a noble and good man can extricate itself

from its deepest perplexity and, being purified by the tragic pathos, can acquire new energy, and rise above its broken earthly existence—this is the ideal character, and upon it is based the fundamental idea, the internal unity of the whole. This, therefore, must of itself determine the construction of the drama in all its parts, as the form of the tree is determined by its seed.

In the first place marriage—in the scale of the development of human life—marks the age of *manhood*. It may be becoming in a youth, to indulge in the sentimental play of love; youth is the betrothed state of humanity. A man, however, is destined to be a husband, a father; what is becoming in a youth is repulsive in him; manhood is no longer the time for play, it has to take upon itself the earnestness of love, as well as of life, and the earnestness of love is marriage. The hero of our drama, accordingly, could only be a fully developed *man*, and, moreover, for the sake of the sublime ideal stand-point, a man, in the *eminent* sense of the word, that is, a man of a high mind, of great energy of character, of distinguished power of action, a hero in war or in politics, therefore a man of honour and of fame—because it is the duty of a man to be active in the service of his country and of humanity, and because he is pre-eminently called upon to great deeds—a man to whom his honour must be peculiarly dear, as the bond between him and his sphere of activity. Such is Othello. Such a man, however, must have by his side, in the woman he chooses as wife, an equal; one equally noble, equally great in womanliness; without this there could never be a true and complete marriage between them. An Othello can only love a Desdemona, a Desdemona only an Othello.

If such a marriage is to be destroyed in spite of its truth and sincerity, it can happen only by a discord in the inmost essence of human nature. This discord is that general human frailty, which places right against right, and good against good, and thus burdens man with the curse of evil, just as he intends doing what is right and good. Othello's and Desdemona's marriage, although thoroughly justified, nevertheless began with a wrong; the father's curse gives it a tragic impress from the very

first. Still this flaw would of itself be insufficient to occasion the ruin; it rather forms but the general tragic basis, upon which it has stood from the outset. External relations and circumstances may indeed externally disturb and break a genuine marriage, but cannot internally destroy it. This can happen only by the dissolution of its internal bond, by a shock to the original *love*, esteem, and confidence, and when this actual foundation begins to waver, it threatens the downfall of the whole edifice. But genuine love cannot of itself become faithless any more than it can turn into suspicion and distrust; it would not be genuine love if it could do so, for its nature is unreserved devotion, unreserved confidence. External circumstances therefore must give the first touch to the discord and distrust. To effect this, however, more is required than a couple of accidents, misunderstandings, or imprudences. It is only a whole series of apparently palpable proofs that can excite the conviction of infidelity in a truly loving heart, that can confirm it in its suspicions and drive it to action; and, in fact, active measures will be taken only when the apparent proofs, at the same time succeed in arousing the passion of wounded love of honour, of jealousy and revenge, and keep them in a state of ferment. Still, such a chain of circumstances, accidents, and imprudencies does not become linked together of itself; such a ferment, which does not leave one moment of calm reflection, cannot maintain itself in a noble, manly character. To effect this there must be the leading hand of an intentional, plotting intellect, the very master of wickedness in combining means and effects; in short, *intrigue* alone can produce such an effect.

In accordance with this internal ideal necessity, Othello's noble, lofty manliness, and Desdemona's genuine womanliness are contrasted with Iago's vulgarity and wickedness, and with Emilia's frivolity and thoughtlessness. And as the nature of marriage forms the foundation of the dramatic action, the poet, with significant intention, again connects the two contrasts to the characters of his hero and heroine, by their conjugal relation. Iago's and Emilia's ill-assorted marriage forms the contrast to

Othello's and Desdemona's full and perfect marriage; the distorted shape of the former serves as a striking foil to the beautiful form and true nature of the latter. The fundamental idea of the drama, therefore, is again carried out in a double manner. As Iago's artifices—supported by his ill-assorted marriage with Emilia—disturb the foundation of Othello's life, i.e., his love and marriage with Desdemona, so the ruin of Iago and Emilia is simply the result of their bad, false marriage. Marriage proves to be the tragic fate of both couples. Othello falls, because, as he himself says, he 'loved not wisely, but too well,' because the two possessions which made life dear to him—love and honour—had been wrested from him by Iago's cunning; hence he loses his self-possession; the nerve of his moral power is severed and his whole being entirely broken down. The means employed by Iago to attain his object are partly suggested by his own conjugal relation with Emilia, and partly by the special nature of Othello's marriage. For a true, perfect marriage is possible only between two such frank, straightforward, ~~un-~~suspicious, but also careless and readily deceived characters as Othello and Desdemona. That Othello is wholly incapable of entertaining the thought that he could be intentionally belied, and that Desdemona, in her innocence, enters the snare laid for her, are the chief instruments of their destruction in Iago's hands. The latter, however, also makes the wrong which, from the very first, has weighed upon Othello's marriage, serve his purpose: Desdemona has deceived her father, she may consequently deceive her husband; this is an argument of great power of proof, which therefore throws the first spark of suspicion into Othello's soul. As, accordingly, the *destruction* of Othello's and Desdemona's true and beautiful marriage is the cause of their tragic fate, so it is just the reverse—the *continuance* of the half, unreal marriage—which proves the ruin of Iago and Emilia. The one, as well as the other, follows consistently from the same idea; both contrasts complete one another, because they, as it were, are but the obverse and reverse of the same coin. For that which, under proper use, brings happiness and life, under abuse occasions mischief

and death. Iago and Emilia have from the beginning abused the sacred institution of marriage; for their very marriage bond was an offence against moral law, because even in its origin it was without true love, without moral foundation, consequently *no* marriage, but, to give it its right name, only a kind of concubinage. The very existence of this immoral relation could not but bring ruin upon them; and thus it is quite just that Emilia should meet with her death by the sword of her own husband, and just also that Iago finds his disgraceful ruin—as a convicted criminal—through the testimony of his own wife.

That, accordingly, the principal incidents of the dramatic action arise organically out of one and the same germ, must, I think, be apparent to any critics who take into consideration the composition, the internal unity and harmony of the piece, and even to those who are the express opponents of all æsthetic criticism. But Shakspeare's masterly hand also contrives to incorporate the secondary incidents and secondary personages with the one great organism, as mediating intermediate parts. Thus, in the first place, old Brabantio's fate, his sufferings, his death—the result of his grief about the infidelity of his daughter—is caused by his own erroneous opinion as to the nature of marriage, which he makes dependent, not merely upon true love and genuine human worth, but upon all kinds of external considerations of birth, and for which reasons he believes it to be his duty to refuse his daughter to the man who truly deserves her. This is so evident, that we need not say more in proof of it. But even the characters of Roderigo, Cussio and Bianca, so far as the definite outlines are given, appear conceived and sketched from the same point of view. Roderigo's love for Desdemona is founded neither upon the knowledge of her high worth, upon true esteem and respect, nor upon the infallible attraction of a pure heart to a kindred soul, but upon sensual desires, which amount to wild passion. After Desdemona is married, therefore, he lives only in the hope of leading her to commit adultery. This villainous design, this contempt of the sacredness of marriage, puts him into Iago's clutches and drives him, under the latter's direction,

to all kinds of crimes, in which he finds his well-merited, and disgraceful ruin. His life and fate are, therefore, entirely dependent upon the position which he himself takes in regard to the inviolable moral necessity, here manifested in the nature of marriage. Cassio, on the other hand, because sound at heart, although weak and easily led, and because his transgression against the moral power of marriage and his relation to Bianca—although of an immoral nature—are based more upon youthful error and pity for the poor amorous girl, is consequently, so to say, but grazed by the tragic pathos. And yet his relation to Bianca is the occasion of the suffering which comes upon him, and, in this connection, entirely assumes the character of a punishment for his unchaste mode of life. Lastly, that Bianca's nature and life, owing to her transgressions in love, her contempt for marriage and connubial restraints—which avenges itself in the very fact that she is converted and changed in consequence of her passion for Cassio, and that she now perceives the unattainable object of her existence to be a union with him—is inwardly broken and destroyed, and finally ruined in the struggle against the moral power of marriage, is as clear as daylight, *i.e.*, it is as clear as daylight that the tragic pathos of all the dramatic characters emanates from one and the same point.

This all-embracing bond leaves outside of its circle only those persons who take no direct part in the dramatic action, and yet even they are by no means superfluous, but also have their significance and relative necessity in the one fundamental thought which forms the centre. The Doge and Senate of Venice with their subordinates Gratiano and Lodovico are, on the one hand, the administrators of the positive right and law, who have to judge the crimes of the various characters and to restore order in the moral relations; on the other hand their task is to exhibit the relations of the various characters to the state and to social conditions, and thus to weave the general position of affairs, the spirit of the age and the character of the nation, into the representation as the co-operating agents in the dramatic action. For the same reason, the passing din of war, Montano with the Cyprian officers,

sailors and people, are introduced, as it were, to set off the picture. For it is only in times of misery, of political storms and wars that the value of peaceful, conjugal happiness, or the power of passion, manly energy, quick decision of action—in the present case more especially the significance of honour—can rise to such a pitch as to engulf all existence within itself. Moreover, Italy, and particularly Venice, was pre-eminently the land of intrigue, of treacherous cleverness and cunning, and the people pre-eminently disposed to revenge and jealousy. Even the momentary appearance of the Fool, lastly, is not so entirely senseless and wanting in motive as appears at first sight. When regarded as a mere servant he is, so to say, his own counterpart, that is, he appears only to intimate that wit and jest are out of place on one and the same ground with devilish wickedness and rash acts of violence.

In conclusion, I have only to add that even this most terrible of all Shakspeare's tragedies is not entirely wanting in the elevating and conciliatory element—even though it shines across the dark night only like a faint glimmer of light; for although individual scenes make the direct impression of being offensive and revolting—the chief reason of which is the great predominance allowed to accident and intrigue in the development of the tragic catastrophe—still, in the end, after the first impression has given way, we leave the tragedy more with the feeling of deep sorrow and intense pity than of terror and horror. And in this very feeling we have the assurance that, even though deeply concealed, there slumbers within the fearful deeds and the equally fearful fate of Othello, some spark of moral elevation and ideal conciliation; slumbers it is true, but only awaiting the reviving rays of the sun. The conciliatory element lies, as I think, at the very end of the action; this may seem paradoxical, for the end is Othello's suicide, consequently a new crime. Very true; but although suicide, taken objectively, is and remains absolutely a crime, still, subjectively it may have motives pointing to a genuine moral state of mind, and may, to a certain extent, ennoble it. In fact, our judgment of moral actions is very different if we measure them by the standard,

not of the outer deed, but by the inmost centre of the mind, by the full and complete form of the inner man. For, as man can never sufficiently know this deepest centre in the nature of another, he ought never to judge it except by the given outward form of the deed. However, the true poet makes us acquainted with the former as well, he reveals the most hidden impulses of actions, and shows us not merely the periphery, but also the determinating centre. If we look at the drama in this way, Othello's suicide will appear in quite a different light. Looked at from within it is obviously but the extreme expression of his deep, bitter, boundless repentance and contrition, a necessary result of the vehemence, passionateness and violence in which, in his case, even repentance and atonement express themselves, a self-condemnation to which such powerful, eminent natures, such heroic figures, which rise far above ordinary humanity and its standard, have a certain degree of right. Othello knows that according to human right and law he must be condemned; by pronouncing and carrying out the judgment upon himself, he but satisfies the law, whose judicial slowness and possible pardon would be intolerable to him in the violence of his rage against himself. This he distinctly expresses in his last words, when he says :

“ I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am ; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice : then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well ;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme ; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away,
Richer than all his tribe ; of one, whose subdu'd eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this :
And say, besides,—that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian, and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him—thus ! ” (*He stabs himself.*)

Assuredly the soothing power of the ‘tears’ which Othello sheds over his bloody deeds, is strong enough to

wash away the blood and to heal the deadly wounds; the overpowering weight of his repentance and contrition counterbalances the weight of his crimes. For true, ideal justice does not look at the deed but at the doer; it does not judge according to the greatness of the crime, but according to the greatness of the repentance. And thus we leave the drama deeply impressed with the painful thought that no human greatness is sufficiently great to save it from a deep fall; but also with the soothing certainty that human wit and human cunning may, indeed, ruin a noble and grand character, but are incapable of robbing it of its inner nobility and greatness of soul, or of that power of the mind which rises anew out of repentance and contrition.

CHAPTER III.

KING LEAR.

IN 'King Lear,' love is once more made the fundamental motive of human life, but it is again a different, a new manifestation of the divine power; it is the third and last main form, in which love directly and actively influences the development of human existence, and in which it is revealed as the first and most natural bond of the great organism of humanity, as the basis and fundamental condition of all mental and moral culture. In 'Romeo and Juliet' it is the devotion of betrothed persons and the passionate enthusiasm of youthful love; in 'Othello' it is the manly strength and fulness of conjugal affection, esteem and fidelity; in 'King Lear,' on the other hand, it is *parental love and filial reverence* that are regarded as the centre of all human relations. Here the family bond, in its deep, historical significance, is the ground upon which the poet takes his stand. To represent the aspect of life presented by this point of view in a poetico-dramatic form, and from within the tragic conception of life—is the intention, the leading thought, the fundamental idea of the tragedy.

The high noon-day sun of love has sunk into the still glowing, but fast-fading tints of evening. Lear, in mind and body, is still a vigorous old man, but nevertheless an old man, but one who has not yet overcome the failings of his nature—obstinacy and love of dominion, quickness of temper, and want of consideration; his heart alone has retained the fulness and freshness of youth. Therefore the rich portion of love which has fallen to his lot he lavishes wholly upon his children; he gives them his all, hoping to find, in their love and gratitude, rest from the storms, anxieties, and troubles of life. But this love, which leads him to forget his position as king, in that of

the father, and to neglect all other duties in his anxieties as head of the family, which confounds the inward inclination with outward affection—not merely erring momentarily, but in its obstinacy proving itself so prejudiced that Kent's endeavour to bring it to a true knowledge of itself fails completely, in spite of the pertinacity with which he urges it—this love, as in 'Othello' and 'Romeo and Juliet,' is here also involved in one-sidedness and contradiction. Here, too, it is of a passionate character, devoid of all self-control, which is manifested in Lear's over-hasty banishment of Cordelia and Kent. Nay, his love is not even altogether true in itself, and for this very reason forms a wrong estimate of truth, and rejects genuine pure love, and exchanges it for semblance, falsehood, and hypocrisy. In short, love here, at the same time, falls into contradiction with itself. The tragic conflict has increased, and from having been confined to external circumstances, has now sunk into the deepest depths of the heart; the question, in the present case, does not (as in 'Othello' and 'Romeo and Juliet') turn merely upon the contradiction between the inward justification of their love and the right of parents which stands externally opposed to it; it does not turn merely upon the conflict into which Lear falls by following the beautiful and perfectly-justified impulse of his paternal heart—thus neglecting his duties as king, whereby the right of his paternal love becomes a wrong to his kingdom—but in Lear's very paternal love, the substance stands in contradiction with the form, the *father's* right with the right of the *lover*. As father, as head of the family, whose will determines the outward life of the children, in what they do or leave undone, Lear cannot only have demanded, but, in accordance with his nature, must even have imperiously and inconsiderately required, that his love should be returned by his children's affection, even in the external actions of obedience and submission. However, Lear does not make this demand as a father but as a lover; he confounds the external, obligatory, legal relation subsisting between a father and children, with the internal, free, ethical relations of lovers, whose right consists in the very fact that all outward rights

and duties cease between them. He transfers the one relation to the other, and thereby places paternal and filial love in contradiction to one another, inasmuch as the child cannot perform what it perhaps ought and might do, because the demand is not addressed to its filial obedience, but to its free love, and thus opposes it. For love, in accordance with its very nature, lies in the deepest depths and freedom of the mind; it is itself this very depth and freedom expressed by communion of life, in which each seeks his inmost self and its ideal complement in that of another. The outward deed in itself is, therefore, of no consequence to it; as love, it is no outward action, but an inward, independent, and a self-sufficient life, which, owing to its very nature, expresses itself only in feelings and impulses. It may, therefore, be that love is the motive of actions, and that it speaks and acts itself, but it is not increased by this outward action; this outwardness is, in itself, of no value to it, but is the perfectly accidental, indifferent, unintentional expression of its want to seek its own happiness in the happiness of the beloved. Hence it does not act for its own sake, in order to show, and to prove itself, but purely for the sake of the beloved object. For the same reason also, it does not demand of the beloved any outward action, any palpable proof of love, but is merely concerned about the communion of souls, about their *union* in life and action. Nay, in its full strength and undimmed purity—such as we see in Cordelia, after her banishment—it does not even demand love in return, but rejoices in it only when it is a free gift.

This true form of love is, indeed, active in Lear, the substance is there, but it stands in contradiction with its form, and thereby with itself. In consequence of his confounding filial piety with free filial love, Lear not merely demands the love of his children as his due right, but also demands its outward confirmation in word and deed, corresponding with the way and manner in which his own love manifests itself. He values love according to its outward actions, and hence forms a wrong estimate of its entirely inward nature, which, in fact, cannot be estimated. But this apparent fault of the understanding, this confusion of

ideas, is, at the same time, the result of a defect of the heart in wishing not only to *be* loved, but also to *appear* to be loved, in order that in the measure of his children's love, and in the greatness of their affection he may, as in a mirror, behold and enjoy the greatness and worth of his own person. His love, consequently, is not pure and unconditional, for it is conferred conditionally only, that is, on condition of love in return and its outward testimony; it is not free and spontaneous, for it is not merely a direct feeling, but is reflected in itself, places the value on itself. Thus it becomes, either weakly, sensitive to every rude touch, and unable to bear frankness and truth, or it becomes pretentious, and as virtue becomes a vice through pride of virtue, so Lear's love, owing to its demands is, at the same time, egotism; in giving itself up, it at the same time withholds itself; thirsting for and greedy of love, it is, at the same time, selfish, and filled with hate. This inner contradiction, this unconscious and yet actual cause of the discord in the nature of Lear's paternal love, is the ethical foundation upon which the action is raised. The object and aim of the dramatic action is to solve this contradiction, to conciliate the old man's love with itself, to purify and to restore his disturbed state as a father and king, in an ideal form.

A firm, a sincerely affectionate family bond, embracing equally all members, is a matter of impossibility with such a species of paternal love. A love like this, which demands love and external proofs of love, calls forth a contradiction in the love on the other side, while it bears and fosters a contradiction within itself. In its selfishness it either produces egotism, and, in its untruth, calls forth hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness, or it drives the true love on the other side, back into its inmost self, and leads it to resist all external proofs, in sharp opposition to the false and unreal love. The contradiction in Lear's paternal love, therefore, produces in his children also an external separation; in Regan and Goneril we find selfishness and falsehood, in Cordelia a pure, frank, sincere, but silent and retiring love, sharply and distinctly prominent. Thus Lear's paternal love, in place of calling forth the uniting bond of family life, rather

itself produces the discord. The relation between father and daughters is not broken for the first time on the occasion of the division of the kingdom, it had already been internally destroyed by Lear's own conduct, by the peculiar nature of his love; it is he who has not fastened the bond in its right place, it is tied merely by external relations and considerations; when these break down it unavoidably falls to pieces. This not only points to, but actually determines the tragic fate of the hero and the complication of the main action; for all that follows is but the necessary consequence of the destruction of the family bond. Thereby, however, Lear himself appears the first cause of the whole tragic complication, he himself is to blame for his fate, himself to blame for his children's doings and sufferings; he falls owing to the one-sidedness, the errors and contradictions in his own loving heart.

But as Shakspeare is fond of conceiving and working out his theme from different points, in order to exhaust it as completely as possible, so, in the present case, he is not satisfied with exhibiting the leading thought merely in the fortunes of the king and his family. He takes the same subject again from another point of view. In the same way as the poetical, passionate ardour of Romeo which hurries all before it, is placed in contrast with the cool, prosaic affection of Count Paris, as the pure and genuine marriage of Othello and Desdemona is contrasted with the ill-conditioned union of Iago and Emilia, so the story of King Lear and his daughters proceeds hand in hand with the similar, and yet very different story of Gloucester and his sons. The poet wishes to show us that the moral corruption is not only a single case, but that it has affected the noblest families, the representatives of all the others, and hence, to judge from its nature and origin, a *universal* state of corruption; that, moreover, for this very reason the idea of the drama, the tragic view of life which it is intended to represent, is a generally applicable one—*i.e.*, that unsteadiness and disorder in family life, in whichever form it may appear, is invariably followed by misfortune and ruin. While in the case of King Lear this perverse and in itself unreal affection avenges itself

upon him, Gloster has to bear the punishment of an unrepented youthful sin, of which the old man (as the first scene shows) still thinks with wanton delight. Lear's family life is disturbed from the very beginning by his own character and conduct, by the inner nature of his own love: Gloster has broken the tie by an outward act. His love is equally divided between a bastard and a legitimate son, nay, his affections, as it seems (and as the first scene intimates), are chiefly bestowed upon the bastard; but this paternal love again contradicts itself, inasmuch as it will not grant equal rights to both children; the legitimate son is to inherit rank, title, and estates, the bastard is to come off without anything. The substance and nature of this love, consequently, stands in contradiction with the form of its outward attestation. This contradiction calls forth the same contradiction in the returned love. Edmund, who is to be satisfied with mere sentiments, with a love which contradicts its actions, responds to this imperfect, unjust, unreal affection with the falsehood of a purely external, heartless, and unmeaning proceeding. The more he finds himself to be his father's favourite and the more he feels himself his brother's equal in body and mind, the more deeply he feels the wrong and the more he rebels against the glaring injustice. Edgar, on the other hand, is preferred to all outward appearance, it is true, but, being set aside in his father's affections, shows him no affection in return; he has not been accustomed to express himself frankly to his father, he is afraid of his easily excited anger; he has no perfect confidence in him, because Gloster—owing to his wavering character and uncertain judgment—has not understood how to awaken the child's trust. It, therefore, gives Edmund's cunning but little trouble to destroy the family relationship which is already shaken to its very foundations. For the wantonness with which Gloster broke his marriage vow, corresponds with the credulity and boisterous vehemence with which he accepts Edmund's slanderous accusations; and the want of inner moral purity and sincerity of the family life, corresponds with the want of frankness and confidence on Edgar's part, in consequence of which, and through Edmund's

prevarications, he allows himself to be led to commit actions which are suspicious. In Gloster's case, the open offence on the part of the father is succeeded by the open disgrace of the children; King Lear's concealed selfishness and untruth are followed by concealed hypocritical and treacherous wickedness. Lear, in his domineering self-will, *demand*s external appearance in place of truth; he defiantly chases true love from his side, and hence falls into the power of dissembling falsehood and selfishness. Gloster, on the other hand, is deceived, as it were, *against* his own will; his frivolous conception not merely of marriage, but of moral relations in general—by which, superstitiously, he makes moral freedom dependent upon a physical necessity, and the actions of men upon the stars and celestial phenomena—have thoroughly deluded him; he is, therefore, treated with blind rage and savage cruelty, and deprived of his eyesight. Lear's strong, proud heart, bids defiance to external troubles; he struggles against the fury of the elements, as against the worse ingratitude and unmercifulness of his daughters. It is only from within that he can be subdued; in his violent, convulsive effort to master the great sorrows of his soul, the bonds of reason snap asunder and madness spreads the veil of its dark night over him. The weaker character of Gloster—light-minded in youth and indiscreet and undecided in old age—as in misfortune, he mistakes semblance for reality, so he is too weak for madness, without power to endure, and in his despair rushes upon self-destruction. Hence Gloster's fate, also, is directly contained in the very beginning of the dramatic complication, that is, in his relation to his two sons which, at the same time, is so characteristic of his own nature.

Owing to these facts which form, as it were, the starting point of the action, the tragedy has been considered at fault, inasmuch as Lear's and Gloster's delinquencies are not at all in proportion with the greatness of the tragic pathos to which they in the end succumb; and an unsuccessful attempt has been made to lessen this incongruity by giving the piece a happy ending, in restoring old Lear to his cast-off dignity as king. It is certainly

true that both of the old men—according to human estimation—suffer far more than they have sinned. But the relation between the outward punishment and the inward sin is, in truth, absolutely incommensurable; there is no such relation, it is only a more or less arbitrary invention of man. This is shown in our daily experience of life and history, and to illustrate this truth is the poet's object in this and his other tragedies. Moreover, a punishment which leads to the purification and sublimation of the sinner is never too great, because by this very effect it ceases to be mere punishment. Lastly, Lear and Gloster must be represented infinitely more as sinned against than sinning, so that the spectator may clearly perceive the terrible but infallible truth, that it is the nature of evil to spring up to an incalculable magnitude, like rank weeds from small seeds, and that it is not so much the crime itself as the *cause* of the crime that is the chief fault of evil; moreover that this cause invariably proceeds more especially from a want of moral firmness and a wrong state of family life. It is obviously a matter of internal necessity that, as the course of the action shows, the baneful influence thus caused, affects the woman's mind even more than that of the man—for Edmund, although equally guilty, has at all events some kind of excuse on his side, owing to a dishonour of his birth. For woman, in accordance with her nature, finds the sole prop and stay of her outer and inner life within the family circle; if this support is withdrawn from her, the woman, as a rule, falls lower than the man, who, in accordance with his nature, is thrown more upon himself and placed on a broader basis of existence. That the same rank soil should also bear good, wholesome plants, is, on the one hand, only a proof of the moral freedom of humanity, which, independent of time and space, is restricted neither by circumstances, descent, nor surroundings; on the other, a manifestation of that inner contradiction in Lear's and Gloster's parental love, which calls forth the same contradiction in the characters and hearts of the children. This explains how it is, that by the side of the most hideous vices and crimes, we here meet with the noblest virtues, as in Cordelia and Edgar, in Kent and the Fool. They, as finite human

creatures, do not, it is true, possess the power to prevent the terrible misfortunes, to check the course of fate; Cordelia has to abandon home and country; Edgar preserves his life only by a semblance of the deepest degradation; Kent's love of truth has to take refuge in dissimulation, in order to satisfy his unshaken fidelity to the king; Albany, at first irresolute, wavering and inactive, does not exhibit his moral strength till he is at the extreme point of misery, and the Fool has to hide his compassionate heart, and his deep knowledge of character, beneath the tittle-tattle of wit. For the disease which lurks deep in the inmost nature, has rather first to break out before it can be thoroughly cured; the moral order has to break down and to threaten the destruction of the whole, so that divine justice may manifest its requiting, but at the same time its saving, elevating and conciliatory power. Therefore, every one of the different characters is indispensable for realising the poet's intention. It is only as such instruments that Edgar and Albany assist in restoring moral order and in healing the disorders of the state; Kent has given his powerful help, but being weary of life, tries to withdraw from this last business; the Fool, as such, and Cordelia, as a woman, take no part in it, they disappear from the scene of life, after having fulfilled their mission of having endeavoured to save the friend and father, and justice and morality as personified in them.

If we examine the course of the action somewhat more closely, we here again find the dramatic characters arranged in different groups, which detach themselves in accordance with their natural dispositions and actual circumstances. On the one hand we have Lear and his family, with Kent and the Fool, on the other, Gloster, with his two sons Edgar and Edmund. This natural order is disturbed by the will and characters of the different personages; Regan, Goneril, and Cornwall tear themselves away from Lear and Cordelia; Edmund rises in enmity against father and brother; the realm of light separates itself from the region of darkness. The two old men, although powerless, and henceforth passive, continue to be the mainsprings of the machinery, which they originally set in motion, owing their way of thinking and

acting. Cordelia and her husband, Kent and Edgar, unite in their assistance; while Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall are allied against them. Midway between both parties stands Albany, at first undecided and wavering—like grey between white and black—but finally, when startled out of his inactivity, he becomes the decisive representative of the invincible power of justice and morality. The action and counteraction of these groups lead, with a certain degree of internal necessity, to the further development of the plot and the succession of its chief incidents. Lear's fate is, in reality, already determined by the first scene, by the division of his kingdom and the banishment of Kent and Cordelia. This scene has met with the severest censure; it has been called entirely wanting in motive, childish and absurd. And certainly if Lear, in dividing his kingdom, actually had the intention of meting out what was due to each daughter, according to the degree of her assurances of love, his conduct could scarcely be characterised in other terms. But this was obviously *not* his intention, for, as a somewhat closer examination will prove, Lear had long since determined to abdicate and to divide his kingdom between his daughters; nay, he had even partially carried out his intention. This is clearly evident from the first words with which the play opens, and which Shakespeare would certainly not have placed in so prominent a position, at the head of the whole, without some object. Upon Kent's remark. 'I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall,' Gloucester replies: 'It did always seem so to us: but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most; for equalities are so weigh'd that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.' The division, accordingly, had already been decided upon, it was already settled, and accurate calculations had been made as to what, and how much each daughter was to receive. This is expressly confirmed by the king himself, almost in the first words he utters, for he calls for a map, upon which the boundaries of the territory settled upon each daughter had been marked off, and in consulting the map says: 'Know, that we have divided, in three, our king-

dom.' The division had, therefore, already been made, and when he adds: 'We have this hour a constant will to publish our daughters' several dowers, that future strife may be prevented now,' he himself again expressly says that in 'this hour' he merely intends publicly to make known a decision which he had long since thought of and determined upon. The double reference to the firmness of this decision (*'tis our past intent, our constant will*) intimates that remonstrance and considerations had been raised against it (by Kent or Gloster?), but that these had proved of no avail. In face of these facts and unequivocal explanations, it certainly does sound like a pure contradiction that Lear—after having mentioned Burgundy's and the King of France's suit for Cordelia's hand—should suddenly, and without any transition, address his daughters in the words:

"Tell me, my daughters
(Since now we will divest us, both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state),
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge."

However this demand, and especially the last words—which are the cause of the usual misinterpretation of the scene—cannot possibly have been meant seriously; for, apart from the circumstance that they contradict the facts adduced, Lear himself does not act in accordance with them, but does the very opposite. Directly after Goneril has spoken, *before* Regan and Cordelia have expressed their sentiments, and pointed out the higher degree of their love, Lear, in pointing to the map, gives Goneril her portion: 'of all these bounds, even from this line to this . . . we make thee lady.' And in the same way Regan receives her settled portion *without* regard to the assurance of her love, which is even more exaggerated than that of her sister, and *before* Cordelia has uttered a word. Obviously, therefore, the whole demand was but a freak of the imagination, which Lear did not mean to take into serious consideration, but which it occurred to him to make merely so as to fill up the time till the return of Gloster, who had been dispatched to fetch the Duke

of Burgundy and the King of France about whose suit Lear had just been speaking. The concealed motive of this freak and the carrying it into effect was probably Lear's wish—by an open and public assurance of his daughters' love and piety—to convince himself that his abdication could be of no danger to himself, and that the doubts about its propriety were unfounded. Perhaps, also, the demand was made with the intention of giving a semblance of reason to his determination to favour his daughter Cordelia in the division (which determination he clearly intimates in the words: 'Now, our joy, though our last and least, what can you say, to draw a *third more opulent* than your sister?') and to lessen the reproach of the unequal division of the kingdom. Lear is, therefore, all the more astounded by the severe, abrupt earnestness with which Cordelia takes the subject and positively refuses to give the desired declaration. He asks her repeatedly in amazement, to speak again, 'to mend her speech,' but when she explains to him who demands love, what her duty is, and that when she marries, her husband will carry half her duty and love with him (a not even quite true conception, as the love for a father and the love for a husband do not by any means exclude each other) he is overcome by the vehemence of his temperament and overpowered by his suddenly aroused anger (which, as Goneril afterwards observes, he was never able to curb even in his better and younger years). In his rage he disinherits and banishes Cordelia, and thereby at the same time incurs the apparent reproach of having seriously had the foolish intention of distributing his 'bounties,' according to the degree of his daughter's oratorical cleverness and fair speaking.

But although, accordingly, this so-called absurd conduct of Lear's appears in reality based upon a good motive and to be perfectly intelligible, still the reason why the poet describes the disputed scene so much in detail is not directly contained in it. The scene—apart from what it directly represents—possesses another and more general, symbolical meaning; it is the *symbol*, the concentrated expression of Lear's entire way of thinking and acting, such as was the necessary result of his character, his heart.

and the nature of his paternal love with its internal contradiction; it is a symbolical act which exhibits Lear's whole preceding life in a concise form. The character of the future is self-evident from the nature of this past. After Lear has disinherited Cordelia and rendered Kent outwardly powerless by sentencing him to banishment, after Edgar has fled to escape Gloster's anger, the two old men fall victims to the caprice and wickedness of their opponents. Blow is followed by blow till their misery reaches its highest possible pitch; when family life, the foundation of all morality, is as utterly destroyed as in the present case, when, as Gloster complains and Edgar also says, not only here but throughout the land 'love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father'—the power of evil must then necessarily celebrate its most complete triumph. It is only after this that the turning point can be expected. Cordelia appears with a French army, and Lear and Gloster find at least outward peace, the former under the protection of his daughter, the latter under the guidance of his son Edgar. Still, the *foreign* power from *without* cannot check the internal disorders, nor can it restore the severed ties of family and the state. It is from *within* that the new order has to grow forth. Cordelia, who has thoughtlessly neglected expressly to state that she has not taken up arms for France against England, but for her father against his unnatural daughters—is therefore defeated; her undertaking fails. And yet Goneril and Regan, Edmund and Cornwall cannot remain the victors; vice and iniquity cannot be allowed to have the final triumph. Cornwall, accordingly, is murdered by his own attendant, and his fall proves the first step towards restoration; the one brother falls by the hand of the other, one sister is poisoned by the other, unmasked and condemned, to perish miserably by suicide. Such are the inevitable results of the dissolution of all natural and moral ties in consequence of the destruction of the family life; herein we see the blind, self-destructive power of evil. The guiding hand of divine justice gives its assistance, and the officious villain of a steward is delivered up into

Edgar's hands. This leads to the discovery of the treason, and Albany is thereby induced to take decisive measures against his own wife and the party he had hitherto represented. All this follows with a certain degree of internal necessity.

But this murder of Cordelia—this veiled angelic form with the tender beauty of her loving, maidenly soul, and yet so manly in her resolution and self-reliance, with her deep, peaceful heart which is so strong and pure in feeling, with her silent love and self-denial, with her heroic loyalty—does her death not seem like that of an innocent victim, and, though not without a motive, does it not, however, appear unreasonable and devoid of all internal necessity? It certainly does seem so; and yet when more carefully examined, it is evident that Cordelia did not, from the beginning, stand upon that height of pure love and devotion, of self-control and self-denial, to which she subsequently rises. She too, like all Shakspeare's characters, is not a pure, ideal form, but undergoes an inner development, a process of purification. Cordelia has inherited something of her father's hasty temperament, of his pride and self-will. Shocked at the hypocrisy and dissimulation of her sisters, too proud even to endure the semblance of it, as if she too wanted to win favour and interest by similar flattering speeches and declarations of love (by 'such a tongue that I am glad I have not, though not to have it hath lost me in your liking'), she, in the excitement of the moment, meets her father with undutiful defiance, and answers his loving questions with undeniable harshness and abruptness, in place of affectionately humouring his weakness. This she was not justified in doing, even though she did not understand his behaviour and thought his conduct foolish. She is as well aware of the violence, the impetuosity and domineering spirit of her father's nature, as Goneril, and yet she continues—regardless of his repeated entreaties to consider what she is saying—to reply in her obviously offensive and provoking manner, and finally to give an explanation which could not but irritate him even more, as it contained a distinct reproach against himself and his demands. What she must have expected, must have foreseen, occurs :

Lear bursts out into a fit of rage; she does nothing to check it, to calm it, she lets its full force fall upon her. By this, however, she draws upon her own head a share of the great misery which must follow upon her being disinherited, and which, with some little thoughtfulness, she might have foreseen; nay, to a certain extent she is chiefly to blame for the whole of the terrible catastrophe; it could not possibly have happened had she not been disinherited and banished. By her own fault, therefore, she has become entangled in the tragic fate which is hanging over her father's house; she herself called it forth and has, accordingly, also to fall with it. Her transgression, when compared with the misdeeds and crimes of those around her, does indeed appear next to nothing; she has, certainly, atoned for it by the tenderest love and devotion with which she hurries to the assistance of her aged father, and by which she saves, tends and cures him. But it was she who unfettered the power of evil, and, consequently, she too is drawn along by it amid the general destruction. And yet her tragic fall does not appear at all in proportion with the degree of her wrong-doing. But who will blame the poet for being of the opinion that it is a nobler fate to suffer death to save a father, than to live in the remembrance of the terrible horrors which have fallen upon her home, and in which she has been partly to blame? Or for his having referred the solution of the incongruity, between the wrong-doing and the consequent evil—which, in this world, so frequently remains unsolved—to a future state of existence, and for having considered a death such as Cordelia's not as a misfortune, but as the mere point of transition to a better existence?

The characters next in importance to Cordelia's in inward beauty, in nobility of sentiment, in self-sacrificing love and devotion, are those of Kent and the Fool. In no other case has Shakspeare placed the Fool by profession—this despised appendage of an aristocratic household of his day—in so high a position or brought him forward so prominently; in no other case has he put the comic element in such close and direct proximity with the tragic, as in this drama.

But, in place of this even momentarily disturbing

✓ the tragic effect, Shakspeare has rather contrived to increase and strengthen it. Not only is the wisdom of the Fool a striking foil to the folly of the King which proves so serious in its consequences; not only does it reflect the manner of thought and action of the other characters, and by this very reflex throw a stronger light upon the truth, which the poet considers of so much importance, but the humour of the Fool, at the same time, mirrors the whole depth of the spirit upon which, in fact, the tragic conception of life is based. By means of this humour—which looks upon all life with contempt—the Fool, as it were, plays with the tragic pathos. Suffering and enjoyment, happiness and unhappiness are the same to him; he even makes sport with the heart-rending fate which befalls him, because he places himself beneath its blows. It is, however, by this very means that he appears to have attained to that which is the object of tragic art, the elevation of the mind *over* suffering and misfortune; this is, so to say, personified in him. It is this which exalts humour even to the sublime, and which places it on a level with the dignity of the tragic. Although fully conscious of the thorough earnestness and great importance of life, still he can carry on his jocose game with the great and solemn, as well as with the trivial and light side of life, because, in fact, he is raised above both. It is certainly surprising that the poet ascribes such greatness and profundity of mind to a man who, of his own accord, has chosen the degraded profession of a hired merry-maker. But Shakspeare is fond of striking contrasts, from the very fact of their being pre-eminently dramatic; moreover, to one who looks upon life in general as of little or no importance, his external position in it is of less importance still; he knows that, as a Fool, his way of thinking, and his view of life, is looked upon by wise people, as pure folly, consequently he will prefer the lowest position (that of the privileged Fool), because it gives him the right to lash this very wisdom and to throw the clearest light upon his own views. On the other hand, it is only through the tragic fate of the King and his deep, sincere love for him, that the Fool rises to that highest point of humour, which he had scarcely occupied before, and which he might

never have reached without this lever. Accordingly, his love for Lear is the spring which fructifies his mind and wit, and is the stay and strength of his life: he therefore departs from this life with a witticism on his lips which refers to it: 'I'll go to bed at noon,' these are his last words. His heartfelt sorrow for Cordelia and his beloved King, has broken his heart; he dies, when his master has become insane; his occupation is at an end when he can no longer be of assistance or speak the truth to him who was the sun of his life. This sun, it is true, is still standing in the heavens, it is not yet evening, but its light is obscured and so the mirror which he had to hold up to it, can no longer reflect any image. Thus, not only does the character, but the very fate of the Fool appears most closely interwoven with the fundamental theme of the whole drama—the tragic power and significance of love.

It may, however, be asked why the Fool and his humour are, in this tragedy, placed so decidedly and prominently in the foreground. On the one hand, because the weight of the tragic pathos, which, in the present case, lies with peculiarly crushing force upon the minds of the spectators, threatening utterly to crush them, is in need of a softening counterpoise, on the other hand, because such a terrible disturbance of all moral relations, such a deep degradation of human nature, as is manifested in the unnatural and inhuman conduct of Regan, Goneril and Edmund, generally calls forth humour and a humorous view of life in a deep, contemplative and meditative nature like that of the Fool. Lastly, it must not be overlooked that the poet has also contrived to use the Fool's humour as a motive for the tragic evolution of the plot. For it is evident that Lear's insanity is partly occasioned by the strange, fantastic ideas, with which the Fool constantly keeps lashing the King's folly; with these Edgar's assumed madness co-operates even more effectually.

The King's insanity, as Solgar very rightly reminds us, is not merely justified by psychological reasons; it would be objectionable did it not also possess its *poetical* justification in the organism of the work of art, as such. For, in the present case, it is not, as in 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth,' a subordinate, even though important person, who loses his

reason and is thus rendered utterly incapable, here it is the hero of the drama, the centre, the chief bearer of the tragic pathos, whose mind becomes deranged. This apparent contradiction can be solved only if we conceive family life, in the full depth of its ethical significance, as the basis upon which the drama is founded. Taken in this sense the firmness of the family bond is the principal, the most important and most inviolable condition of all mental and moral culture. If this bond is irreparably torn asunder, and the foundation of human existence thereby destroyed, then the destruction must be exhibited both internally and externally. It is distinctly exhibited here, externally by the breaking up of all human relations, by the fruitless struggle of good against evil; internally and subjectively it attains its climax in the mental disturbance of the King, whose person forms the subjective centre of the whole. His madness is the breaking up of the natural relation subsisting between the inner world of the mind, and the outer, visible world, so that the two domains flow into each other; the mere idea (imagination) becomes an objective phenomenon, the latter turns into a mere idea, consequently into the most thorough, most incisive contradiction, that is, into the deepest internal derangement. The contradiction, in Lear's nature, the combination of love and selfishness, of tender devotion and domineering self-will, of self-sacrifice and pretension, have already been discussed. This contradiction, so to say, lies dormant in unconscious directness, till it is awakened by the behaviour of his daughters; Lear, aroused out of his delusion by their conduct, suddenly finds his whole world in a destructive state of discord, the substance of his consciousness, confused and destroyed. For his heart, with its strong, selfishly-loving feelings, was his world; this is evident, not only in his conduct towards his daughters, but also in his sincere affection for his constant companion, the Fool, who is as much his friend as his servant. It was, however, more particularly his love for his daughters, that formed the tie by which his soul was attached to the outer world, and which—in his old age, at all events—was the only link to the outer world. But this love had become most deeply interwoven with his

love of dominion; he gave up his kingdom only in order to continue to rule through them. When this tie snaps, this throne collapses, he loses himself in the world around him; what had seemed to him absolute truth, is now a delusion; what he had considered real, objective existence, what had been his world, proves itself an illusion; he loses the consciousness of the certainty of Self, as well as that of the certainty of actual reality, and error and truth, imagination and knowledge, ideal and real, flow one into the other, in short, his mind becomes deranged. And inasmuch as this contradiction in Lear has its seat in the inmost centre of his heart, in the nature of his love, and is not called forth (as in Gloster's case by an external act), he alone is seized by madness, and old Gloster remains unaffected by it. It is only in Lear's case that mind and heart, that the sovereignty over the world of his thoughts and feelings, as well as over external existence, have become completely fused into one; it is only Lear, in 'every inch a king,' who has accustomed himself to be absolute *master*. Although, in boundless love, he gives up everything, yet he wants to measure love according to his own estimate of it; he wants to be *master* of it also, and it is love that shall establish his dominion. Even after this visionary empire is overthrown, he still wants to command; he struggles with the elements, he intends, at all events, to remain master of his sufferings and of his fate; he is still determined to be considered *master*. It is in this struggle that he exhausts his strength; external circumstances, the fearful storm to which he is exposed, his meeting with Edgar, the cutting speeches of the Fool, all these things are added and exercise their physical and psychical influences upon his already enfeebled nature. Lastly, a mind like his could scarcely be saved, otherwise than by madness; thus only could the conciliatory element of the tragic pathos be manifested. It is only after his defiant, pretentious, domineering nature, his self-will, pride and egotism in love were, so to say, extinguished in the night of madness, and broken within himself, that he could be brought to humility—the mother of all love—and that love itself could become glorified in him. Accordingly, the psychological motives in the character of Lear are so

intimately connected with the artistic reasons upon which the organism of the drama is founded, that the King's madness appears equally justified from both points of view.

It is with great skill, lastly, that Shakspeare has here also contrived to place the special in the most lively interaction with what is general; here also he has contrived to bring the private and family affairs of his dramatic personages in connection with general, political and social conditions. As in 'Romeo and Juliet,' the state of the popular mind and the character of the time is represented by the interference of the people and of the Prince in the course of events, and in 'Othello' by the participation of the army and of the Senate of Venice in the fortunes of the hero, so, in the present case, the same is attained, partly by express references to the social and moral condition of the country, partly by exhibiting the dissensions in the kingdom which were occasioned by Lear's and Gloster's misfortunes, and which, at one time take the King's part, and then that of his adversaries. Lear is depicted, not only as the head of a family, but also as the head of the state, the ruler of a great nation. The more strongly and directly, therefore, his family relations influence the condition of the whole country, the stronger and more clearly is the universal significance of his family bond set forth. The tragedy shows how, directly, the state of whole countries, and the fate of whole nations is dependent upon the morality or immorality of family life; the drama is thus made the mirror of history, 'the pressure' of the 'body of the time,' not merely in its ideal substance, but externally as well, by the course of the events represented. It is, at the same time, obvious why the poet has expressly placed the scene of but this one of his five great tragedies, in a dark, wild age, which is as yet only struggling for order and law, and whose distinguishing character is not indeed manifested in outward forms, habits and customs, etc.—here, as in all cases, they bear the impress of the sixteenth century—but certainly manifested in the mind and nature of his dramatic personages and more especially in their moral conduct. Such wide-spread and deep-rooted dissension which corrupts

the principal and noblest families of the land, such an unnatural revolt against the first, natural demands of the moral law, can appear consistent only with an age when man is still in a condition where the full power of rude, unbridled desires predominates, and where a titanic strife still stands in opposition to order and law. But the poet in a beautiful manner, at the same time intimates that this wild, disturbed and ruined world longs for reconciliation and peace—for instance in Gloster's words (iv. 6):

“O, you mighty gods!
This world I do renounce; and, in your sights,
Shake patiently my great affliction off,” etc.;

and still more so in Albany's exclamation (iv. 2):

“If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
'Twill come:
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.”

Owing to the great variety of characters, it would lead me too far were I to enter into a discussion of each of the separate personages. There is, upon the whole, no difficulty in understanding them, and, I think, that for my object here, I have sufficiently shown (although only by way of hints) how the action, with a certain internal necessity, grows forth not only out of the ideal foundation of the whole, but also out of the nature and the peculiarity of the characters, and again, how every character lives, acts and receives its destiny in accordance with the position it occupies in regard to the moral power of the family bond, as the, so to say, over-ruling power of fate. Also as regards the diction, I need perhaps scarcely draw attention to the fact of how closely it is connected with the character of the different speakers,—not merely in single words and expressions, but that it also harmonises with the spirit of the whole, being itself, as it were, a whole. This harmony results principally from the fact that the peculiar colouring and the characteristic rhythm of the diction appear in general determined by the character and the tragic pathos of King Lear. Accordingly

there runs through the whole piece a peculiar tone, which sounds to me like the melancholy cry of a heart-rending sorrow, of a vain, fierce striving and struggling;—I mean that while the language of most of the other tragedies ('Romeo and Juliet,' 'Othello,' 'Macbeth,') bears the impression—though variously modified—of a stormy, passionate agitation, which involuntarily carries one away with it without producing any lasting effect, in the present case it appears pathetic *par excellence*, that is, it possesses a heart-rending, affecting, and overwhelming power, which stirs the strings of our souls into a less violent, but long-enduring state of vibration.

As regards the *composition*, and, in the first place, the *external* arrangement of the parts, it appears in the first acts, as consistent as it is clear and intelligible, in spite of the great wealth of material which is exhibited from the very beginning. Directly, from the first two scenes, we foresee the course of the action up to the middle of its path. Regan and Goneril on their part, and Edmund on his, announce their intentions, and these intentions, under the given circumstances, cannot miss their mark. With Cordelia's return, however, there arises a certain degree of indistinctness and uncertainty; in addition to the already existing threads of the plot, we have the intrigues of Goneril and Regan against each other, their plots against Albany, and Edmund's relation to both the former and the latter. Thus the various threads, to be carried on, have become too many for there not to be some complication among one another, or some confusion in the mind of the spectator. Moreover strict criticism must maintain it to be a fault that, at the moment of the greatest complication, a kind of stand-still arises in the action, where the spectator is in momentary doubt as to its further progress and final issue. It is only when Cordelia is defeated and taken prisoner with Lear, that the course of the action again proceeds with that firm, sure, irresistible progress of inevitable fate, which tragedy delights in and demands. From this point we have throughout every scene a glimmering of the end, that is, of Cordelia's and Lear's death, of Edmund's fall and Regan's and Goneril's destruction. The *external composition*--

accordingly—does not, it is true, possess that sharpness, regularity and transparency of arrangement which distinguishes the play of ‘Othello,’ but nevertheless we cannot but admire Shakspeare’s skill in spinning out the manifold threads of an extremely rich and exceedingly complicate action.

To make up for this, the *internal composition*, the development of the leading thought, the fundamental conception upon which the inner organic unity of the drama is based, is all the more clear and perfect. The tragedy shows us—as already intimated—the peculiar form which human life assumes when conceived within the tragic conception of life, from the stand-point of the family relation and its high ethical and general significance. The poet wishes to give us a vivid picture of how the domestic circle—this chief and firmest bond of human society, morality and happiness—snaps asunder and becomes a succession of misfortunes and miseries, if its foundation, purity of heart and free unconditional love, is eaten away and undermined in the heads of the family themselves by a tragic contradiction in its inner nature (as in Lear), or by frivolity and weakness of character (as in Gloster). This thought is reflected not only in the fate of Lear and Gloster and their families, but is also more than usually prominent in all of the secondary parts. For the tie between parents and children is based upon marriage and the relation of betrothed persons, and this again is the basis of the marriage and betrothed state of the children. This is why significant rays of light are also thrown from the centre upon these two civilising influences of human life; this is why the relation in which Regan and Goneril stand to their husbands, as well as the true, pure affection of the King of France for Cordelia—in contrast to Burgundy’s false courtship—are no superfluous additions to the action. Goneril’s and Regan’s marriages are merely the reflex of their behaviour to their father. Such daughters are incapable of being wives in the true sense of the word, or of founding a family; as they have ill-treated their father, so they will deceive their husbands, and by adultery will destroy the beginning of family life in its very bud. Regan has

found a husband of the same mind as herself—Cornwall voluntarily enters into her plans and actions and thus shows us how the internal corruption of the parent-family spreads and passes over from the daughter to the son-in-law; his marriage with Regan is the union of two equally violent, corrupt natures, and, consequently is torn asunder in a violent manner. Albany, on the other hand—who, it is true, disapproves of his wife's conduct, but does not at first venture to check it—is an example of that indecision and incompleteness of the moral character, into which persons of genuine goodness of heart (but wanting in unusual energy) fall, owing to the confusion of all natural relations. His marriage with Goneril is a union of two entirely different natures, and therefore will likewise not be enduring. Edmund also, by his faithless conduct towards Regan and Goneril (with both of whom he feigns to be in love) proves how incapable he is of forming a true marriage and of thus forming a family. Kent's friendship, likewise, is not entirely without reference to the leading motives of the composition; for true friendship is also a part of family life, inasmuch as it is its support and anchor in times of adversity. It would be too heavy a burden for the head of a family to bear his own weight and that of wife and child, without such assistance. This is why the poet places Kent's genuine, self-sacrificing love for Lear in such strong contrast to Gloster's tardy, hesitating affection.

In conclusion I will now only draw attention to the deeply significant and beautiful way, in which the end, which is as affecting as it is exalting, serves to express the fundamental thought of the whole, as well as Shakspeare's own idea of tragedy. Gloster repents and atones for his faults; after his vain attempt to commit suicide, in order, like a coward to relieve himself of the burden of life, he submits and suffers, because, in fact, man has to submit, that is, has to allow himself to be chastened and purified. The salvation of his soul is that his heart breaks in the arms of his long-lost son, who repays the father's injustice with filial love; this last earthly joy shakes the dross from his soul, and it now turns heavenwards in clearness and purity. The weary Kent goes to his rest; he, with his

sterling, vigorous but rugged virtue, has loved, struggled, and suffered enough; his *softened* heart now longs for rest and peace. Edmund, in his last moments, confesses his evil doings and seeks to make all the amends in his power. 'Yet Edmund was beloved!' *beloved*, in spite of illegitimacy, disgrace, and selfishness; these comforting words move his very soul and cast upon him a semblance of the divine power of love; we may assume that he closes his existence with a sigh of repentance. It is only the unnatural daughters—who have no excuse in dishonour of birth, nor have suffered injustice to their rights, who were not urged on by their own nature, but by their own pleasure in vice and destruction—who perish one by the hand of the other, without remorse and without consolation, a very contrast to Cordelia's noble, blissful death for the sake of her father. Lear's deranged mind, the contradiction in his love, terminates in a mortal sigh for Cordelia's loss; this anguish proves the sincerity, and gives worthy expression to the fulness and the intensity of the love which animates his heart. Inasmuch as the feeble sparks of his life are extinguished by it, his love is cleared of the dross of its earthly existence, and ascends to heaven purified and glorified. Lear, in his extreme humiliation and need (where he can no longer give, and can only receive), has recognised the true nature of love, or rather he has *learned* and *lived* to see that love does not consist of words and actions, of gifts and counter-gifts, but of feeling and sentiment, the sacrifice of one's inmost self. His sufferings have cleared his heart of all self-will, all love of dominion, he has become so completely one with the object of his love that he dies with it, as, latterly, he had lived only in it. Gloster's death in Edgar's arms, Lear's breathing his last with the corpse of Cordelia in his arms, is the necessary conclusion to the tragic development. For the internal contradiction, out of which it arose, is thereby solved; love has subdued it, and in its triumph over the hostile powers, by surviving want and death, it proves its sanctifying and blessed omnipotence. With this victory the tragic pathos loses its depressing influence, and changes into the elevating feeling of a gentle death and blissful peace.

Shakspeare's 'King Lear' may—as Gervinus thinks, though not exactly in his sense—be called the tragedy *par excellence*, the climax of tragic art and tragic effect, to such a height does it carry the marvellous blending of softness, of intense and emotional feeling with the deeply pathetic, the awful and the terrible, which affect the soul with equal power from both sides. Gervinus justly asks whether—in the poetry of all times and all nations—anything more touching and more affecting for the stage was ever written, than the scene of recognition between Cordelia and the awakening Lear. But as little could any poem equal it in the exciting and overwhelming power of those scenes, where the aged king—thrust out into the fearful storms of night—combats with the raging elements, with the terrible anguish of his soul and with his approaching madness, till in the end he succumbs to his more powerful antagonists. It is, however, just here, that there is an easily recognisable and hence often censured defect in this great work of art. Shakspeare, in allowing himself to be misled by the predilection of his age and nation for scenes of blood and horror, has carried the tragic effect to the height of what is repulsive and revolting. To have the scene where Cornwall puts out Gloucester's eyes, represented directly on the stage, can only arouse a feeling of disgust which has nothing in common with the idea of beauty, nor with that of grandeur, power or sublimity, and which consequently can only impair the effect of the tragedy. Whether or not the nerves of Shakspeare's public may have been of a stronger fibre than those of the present generation—it is not the business of art to consider strong or weak nerves, but to aim only at the strengthening, the refreshing and elevating of the mind and feelings, and such scenes do not effect this even in the case of the strongest nerves. A second defect has already been referred to. The main levers of the action and its tragic course are contained in the first two scenes, in Lear's conduct, Cordelia's disinheritorship and Edgar's flight. And yet the decisive motives for both Lear's and Edgar's proceedings are enveloped in a certain degree of misty obscurity; they can, indeed, as already said, be surmised with the aid of re-

flection, from interspersed hints and indications, but they are not brought distinctly forward. The actor's skill, however, can remedy the defect by appropriate gestures, by special accentuation of those words, etc., containing the hints, and if we are to do Shakspeare justice we must never lose sight of the fact that he wrote only for the stage, and might with safety calculate upon the intelligent play of his fellow actors, who would meet him in his intentions, and whom he no doubt rehearsed in their respective parts. When well acted 'The Tragedy of King Lear and his daughters, of Gloster and his Sons,' (this is the original title) will, at the present day produce the same mighty effect, which we know it did on its first appearance.

CHAPTER IV.

MACBETH.

IN 'Romeo and Juliet,' in 'Othello,' and 'King Lear,' the drama keeps exclusively within the region of feelings and sentiments, of emotions and passions. The point of view from which it represents life and history is, to a certain extent, the simplest and most natural, so to speak, the patriarchal state of society, the first stage of human life, where the destiny of man appears directly dependent upon internal and external circumstances, and where the form and nature of the earliest, primary, and original relations of human society—courtship, marriage, and the family circle—are expressed. It is not the will with its pre-meditations, not the thought with its free and conscious activity, but the direct sentiment, the want of free feeling—amounting to passion—which, in these dramas, directly becomes the tragic action, and consequently the tragic destiny. Intention, deliberation, reflection appear only as subordinate motives of the tragic development, inasmuch as they do not so much belong to the characters of the principal persons in whom are manifested the power and significance of the tragic pathos, but rather to the actions of the secondary personages who stand by the side, or are opposed to them as adversaries.

A different point of view is taken by the poet in the case of 'Macbeth.' Here it is the *will* with its aims and objects, the manly *deed* with the often deeply hidden springs of its origin, and the deliberate purposeness of its accomplishment, that form the chief motives of the tragic development. The poem therefore quits the region of those natural, simple, and fundamental relations of human society, and enters into the more complicate relation belonging to a different stage of human civilization, that of the *state*, the foundation of which is the justice and morality

of external *works*, and which, therefore, is no longer governed by the gushing immediateness of feeling and passion, but by the manly will, in its manifestation as the deliberate deed. This is the ground upon which the poet here takes his position, in order therefrom to arrange his tragico-poetical picture; it represents the lofty greatness of a manly, heroic energy of will and action, the tragic fall and ruin of which that forms its substance. The peculiar modification thus given to the general tragic view of things is then (as in the first three tragedies) still more definitely limited and shaded off by the peculiar relations in the lives and characters of the principal personages, as well as by the spirit and character of the time and nation in which the scene of the story represented is laid.

The tragedy opens in an extraordinary manner by the appearance of the three witches, who flit across the scene and vanish after giving an obscure intimation of their designs upon Macbeth. This opening, and indeed the whole of the witchery here introduced, has been censured by some as being a remnant of a degrading superstition, by others as being unpoetical and inconsistent with the nature of tragedy. The first objection is one of those prosaic views of the eighteenth century which, in rejecting the happily overcome superstition, at the same time threw overboard its poetical significance; the other is simply unreasonable, and is based partly upon an erroneous view as to the nature of tragedy, partly upon a superficial conception of the censured drama. If lofty energy of will and action be the field upon which the power of the tragic pathos is here manifested, then just this very opening and the introduction of the witches serves, at the beginning, to throw the clearest light on the tragic foundation upon which the drama is to be constructed. The will of man is not *absolutely* free *self-determination*, with the full and clear consciousness of its motives; it is rather only *conditionally* or *relatively* free, determined not merely by the definite, demonstrable influences of individual things (of which it becomes conscious), of special relations and circumstances, but also by those dark, involuntary and unconscious influences, which are the result of the *general* position of affairs, the general character of the world of

man and surrounding nature, which forms, so to say, the atmosphere in which it has its life and which affects its decisions. This atmosphere acts like air and moisture upon the seed of the determination; it can hasten and mature it, so that it may shoot forth quickly as a germ; it can, however, also check and destroy it, so that it may never become a germ or merely obtain a stunted existence. If the general conditions and relations are favourably met by the instinct, the inclination, by the first embryonic, and as yet indefinite thought in the breast of man, then the inner impulse does not indeed necessarily become a determination, but it requires an incalculably greater strength of will and self-control to overcome the inclination, and to lead the thought into another direction. Nay, it is frequently the external circumstances and relations which first awaken and develop the dormant inclination, without which man would perhaps never have become clearly conscious of it.

This knowledge, or if it be preferred, this feeling of the connection between the human will and the outer world became Shakspeare's, if not conscious, yet unconscious and instinctive motive for retaining in his tragedy the figures of the witches offered by the old legend. He wished by the actions assigned to them and their chief, Hecate, not merely symbolically to point out the demoniacal power of ambition, to which the hero falls a victim, but they were, to him, at the same time, the allegorical expression of the mysterious interaction between the human will and the surrounding outer world; to him they signify the power of *evil*, which, by having struck root in man himself, also meets him—with tempting and seductive allurements—externally in the forces of nature, in accidental events, conditions, and relations; they are to him the personifications of those powers of nature and of the mind which mature the seed of the determination, awaken the dormant thought and excite the desires, powers which sometimes present themselves to man as sudden phenomena from the land of wonders, and which point out to him the road he is to follow. They, at the same time, represent the necessary, though dark and mysterious connection between what is evil, hideous, and destructive in nature and the moral

wickedness in man, a connection, the existence of which can indeed only be suspected, but which, therefore, excites the imagination all the more forcibly. The presentiment of this connection and the interaction between the two powers, gave rise to the ancient popular belief in the Devil and demons, as in the Middle Ages it induced the superstitious belief in witches and wizards. This belief—which since the end of the fifteenth century (with the beginning of the legal trials of witches) had become a matter of law, quite contrary to its own thoroughly spiritual, fantastico-symbolical nature, and had acquired a terrible, practical importance—Shakspeare has here made use of, not merely as available for poetical purposes, but because he recognised its deep symbolical truth, perhaps, also, in order to point out its *merely* symbolical significance. His witches, therefore, are by no means mere inner visions, nor merely the ‘embodiment’ of inward temptation; they are real, living creatures, but with more resemblance to the old Germanic *Nornes*, than to the mediæval witches, they are not, as the popular belief would have it, ordinary old women of human origin, in ordinary human circumstances, but hybrid creatures, partly supernatural beings belonging to the night-side of this earthly existence, partly weird spirits who have fallen from their original innocence and are deeply sunk in evil; at all events, something apart from the world of humanity, and at home in a sphere partly above, partly below that of human life. Their nature, that is, the significance given them by Shakspeare, is distinctly shown by the way in which they take part in the action. They prophesy honours and dignities to the hero, and what they foretell comes to pass either directly, or the fulfilment of their promises is left to futurity; in other words, they represent the powers of chance and the favour of circumstances which raise the hero step by step in order, by the greatness that is granted him, to awaken his desires for those greater and highest distinctions, which he does not as yet possess; more especially, however, in order to extinguish in Macbeth’s soul the fear called forth by his quick, sensitive imagination (about the failure and dangerous consequences of the criminal deed), by their delusive description of the

happy issue, the acquisition of the royal dignity. After he has committed the crime and fallen into their trap, they—by promising him very special external conditions, which are connected with his fall—gently rock him into that false security which does not let the criminal come to perfect self-consciousness, and induces him to follow the path he has entered upon, to its extreme end. In other words, they represent the apparent favour of external circumstances, which promises the evil-doer exemption from punishment and the undisturbed enjoyment of the wrongfully acquired possession. Accordingly, they are, in fact, the personified echo of evil, which responds, from nature and the general condition of the outer world, to the evil in the breast of man; they call it forth and help it to come to a determination and action, and urge it forward on the road to evil. But, it may be asked, why does the poet just in this tragedy give these powers (which more or less assert themselves everywhere) such an independent, significant form, and cause them so visibly to take part in the action? Not merely to be the motives of the deep fall of so great and noble a mind as Macbeth's, but, at the same time, to *lessen his guilt*, and thus to retain our sympathy and the ~~tragic~~ pity which might otherwise easily be turned into horror and disgust (by deeds such as are here exhibited), and consequently destroy the tragic impression.

After having by the appearance of the witches—as well as by the character of the half fabulous times in the far north and its corresponding grand, wild scenery—indicated the point of view from which the drama is conceived, the poet then introduces the heralds of Macbeth's glory and greatness. The mighty, victorious hero is presented to us in all his magnificence, even before we have ourselves seen him. However, Macbeth's heroism, his heroic strength of will and energy already bear in themselves the germ of his ruin, the tragic contradiction, the conflict between right and wrong which forbodes mischief. For it is only true heroic greatness, the highest mental force and strength of will that should hold the highest power, the sceptre and the crown. These qualities he possesses, whereas they are obviously wanting in the gracious Duncan,

notwithstanding his other excellent qualities ; this is proved even by the many rebellions against his government which he, of his own strength, is incapable of mastering. But his external, positive right stands in hostile opposition to his internal justification, which is only capability, not a right. Duncan has the right to remain king, because, in fact, he is so by virtue of existing legal relations. Nay, Macbeth even despairs of ever acquiring the kingly dignity, for Scotland—according to the poet's representation—is not legally and constitutionally an hereditary kingdom, but it has become the custom of the country that the son shall succeed the father. Thus, immediately after Macbeth's victories, Duncan (as Shakspeare significantly tells us) proclaims his son Malcolm, Duke of Cumberland, that is, as his successor. Macbeth, accordingly, can assert his inward claim to the throne—of which he is first made clearly conscious through the prophecy and flattering speeches of the witches—only by doing a wrong, by a crime.

The personal discord in Macbeth's own character stands side by side with the existing discord between his ideal and real right to the throne. Macbeth's is a lofty, glorious and highly gifted nature. He strives for what is highest and greatest, from an internal sympathy for all that which is great. But in endeavouring to acquire it he, at the same time, has the wish to satisfy his own self, to possess what is highest, not only because it is high, but in order thereby to raise himself. His ardent desire to perform great deeds is mixed with the desire for the fame of his own name, for the eminent power and greatness of his own person. Up to the commencement of the drama he has kept this desire, this ambition under the discipline of the law ; as yet he has nowhere gone beyond the lawful measure, that delicate line which preserves honour from becoming ambition, and distinguishes it from vice. Thus, at least, he is described by his own wife, who must surely be the best judge. She places special emphasis on the discord in his nature, and says that he is 'too full o' the milk of human kindness, to catch the nearest way,' that he 'would be great' and is 'not without ambition,' but without the 'illness,' that should attend it, that what he wishes

'highly' he wishes 'holily' that he would 'not play false' but yet would 'wrongly win.' This is Macbeth before his interview with the witches. It is they who first determine in favour of that 'illness,' the slave of ambition, whose assistance he had hitherto despised; it is their prophecies which first arouse in his breast the slumbering thought of royal dignity, their words which first fan the sparks of his ambition into a flame, and lead him to think of the murder (as is proved by the 'horror' that seizes him at the thought of the king). It is first under their influence that the scarce born wish rapidly becomes a desire, the desire a resolve, the resolve a deed. And after the earnest warnings of his timid conscience (the proofs of his originally noble nature, which argue with such force that he is almost persuaded to yield to them) have been overcome by the stinging speeches of his proud, energetic wife—his superior in decision of character—the crime is actually committed, favoured by accident and opportunity, which in this case again agreeably meet both the wish and the resolve. The several incidents in its development are described with profound psychological knowledge; from the first horror at the mere thought of the revolting crime, to the last moment of its completion, where the warnings of conscience are forcibly stifled. The fearful voice: 'Macbeth hath murdered sleep,' which, directly after the crime, makes the murderer tremble to his very soul, gradually dies away. When the foul deed is once done, all consideration, all sense of shame and horror are immediately thrown aside; Macbeth, who shortly before was in hesitation, in doubt, and, as it were, only driven on by his wife, now proceeds along the path he has entered upon independently and firmly, in no need of any spurring forward. The evil, after it has once taken root, rises suddenly to a terrible climax. Duncan's sleepy chamberlains are killed without actual necessity or reasonable motives; Malcolm and Donalbain, calumniously charged with parricide, have to seek their safety in flight; Banquo is murdered simply on account of the fear and jealousy excited by the happiness promised him; Macduff's wife and little ones, and all who in any way appear dangerous, fall victims to revenge and suspicion.

Macbeth seeks to stifle the anxious fears of his guilty conscience by a restless and untiring activity, which unscrupulously heaps crime upon crime in order to secure the unrightful possession. His conscience, in the silent hours of night, always arouses his sensitive imagination anew, and forces him perpetually to think of dangers, plots, horrors and awful scenes of every description, dangers which he again seeks to prevent by new crimes. This secret sting of conscience drives him ever deeper into the slough of sin, in the false hope that he may thus secure the crown which has been bought by blood, murder and treachery. Thus the universally admired hero becomes an all-aborred tyrant, for

“Things had begun make strong themselves by ill.”

As attempts have been made to rob Macbeth of his manliness and heroic greatness, by maintaining that courage and bravery are not innate qualities of his nature, but mere expressions of his blood-thirstiness and cruelty, or, at all events, the mere results of excitement, passion and despair, so, on the other hand, it has been thought necessary to save Lady Macbeth's womanliness by the supposition that she is not ambitious on her own account, but merely out of love for her husband. Both of these suppositions, in my opinion, are erroneous. As regards Macbeth, the unbiassed reader requires no proof of the poet's having, in him, thought of a great and noble character, an heroic nature of the old northern power and bulk. Now Lady Macbeth is of the same heroic nature, of the same stuff, although in female form, consequently *without* feminine devotion, *without* love. A species of love she no doubt has for her husband, but what can this species of love signify but that it is, in reality, no right love? She is a woman who—owing to her capacity of rising to the enthusiasm of passion in order to attain a great object, and owing to her eminent intellect, her firmness and decision of character, more especially the strength of mind with which she contrives to master her sanguine, choleric temperament and her violent impulses—has, inwardly, even more of a natural vocation for ruling than Macbeth. Ambition in her, therefore, takes more the form of love of

dominion than thirst for honour (this is expressly stated by Holinshed in his Chronicle, which Shakspeare^r made use of, and is also intimated by Macbeth in his letter to his wife); this, in fact, lies in the nature of woman; a woman without love has a desire to rule, and a woman who wishes to rule, is incapable of loving, at least, as a woman, she loves her husband simply as an equal. In this sense she loves and esteems Macbeth as the worthy partner of her strivings, as the strong, active accomplisher of their common plans, as a congenial mind of the same heroic nature as her own. But there can be no question about any other than this kind of love, either in her case or in Macbeth's; it is evident that there is no sincere communion of souls, pure, disinterested personal devotion between them, either on her part or on his. This is clear, on the one hand, from the fact that Lady Macbeth—after her husband has risen to the throne, retires completely into the background (whether it be of her own accord or that she is ordered there by Macbeth); on the other hand, from the cold indifference with which Macbeth receives the news of her death. In short, her love for him, as his for her, is obviously based only upon their common mode of thinking, striving, and acting. He respects and fears her reckless energy, and she knows very well that it is only with her husband that she can rule, only through him that she can reign. But for this very reason she not only considers herself justified in leading him according to her mind—as is proved in her monologue, after receiving the letter—but even in denying her position as wife, her love and esteem for her husband, where the object which she is in pursuit of, and which she, at the same time, knows to be his, demands it. For instance, in her conversation with Macbeth shortly before the murder of Duncan, as well as in the scene between Macbeth and Banquo's ghost, her short, abrupt, but always apt mode of speech, is sharp, cutting, and unsparing. For the object she has in view is to her of more importance than her husband; she pursues it with all the means in her power, and without consideration; to obtain it she would herself have committed as cold-blooded a murder; her own words are: 'Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done 't.'

This is a significant trait in her character, and a proof that in her breast also, there lies concealed some drops of that 'milk of human kindness' of which, in her opinion, Macbeth's heart is 'too full.' And, indeed, she is by no means a criminal from an inherent tendency to evil, on the contrary, her conscience would not permit her to do any wrong that did not appear necessary for the *great* object. In order to do such deeds she has first to strengthen herself by artificial means (she drinks of the drugged wine which she gives the chamberlains); moreover, she is capable of acting only while in the violent state of excitement, into which Macbeth's letter and Duncan's arrival have thrown her. Therefore, when she sees that she does not acquire sovereignty with the throne (for Macbeth does not share it with her), and that the crown, acquired by murder and treachery, does not bring contentment either to him or to herself, but that the bloody seed continues to produce new anxieties and fears, ever bloodier fruits, then her conscience awakens, is seized with the vehemence peculiar to her nature, and—alone with her own tormenting thoughts and her strong spirit, which when awake rules every word, every gesture—she succumbs to that mental disease in which (while asleep) she unconsciously betrays the fearful secret. In the end, with the courage of despair, she falls by her own hand.*

* The above sketch of the conception of the character of Lady Macbeth, I think, sufficiently explains her conduct in all points, in what she does and leaves undone, as well as her sufferings and death, especially if it be also assumed (which, indeed, is only a supposition) that she was a widow when Macbeth married her, and that she had children only in her first marriage, not by Macbeth—an hypothesis which H. Köster (*Jahrbuch der D. Shakesp. Gesellschaft*, i. p. 156 f.) has endeavoured to establish more in detail, and with which I, on my part, agree. Still, it is a fault of the tragedy that the motives which, in the first instance, determine the conduct of Lady Macbeth, are not clearly and distinctly brought forward, and that, accordingly, Lady Macbeth's mental disturbance, in its sudden, direct outburst, is not properly founded on her character and her state of mind. However, I also agree with H. Köster (*l.c.*, p. 143 f.) in considering it very probable—from reasons adduced by him—that the tragedy has come down to us *not* in the genuine, original form in which Shakspeare left it, but only in a mutilated state, for the use of the stage, with great abbreviations, more especially in the first part. No wonder, therefore, that such entirely different conceptions of the character of Lady Mac-

In whatever way, however, the character of Lady Macbeth may be conceived and judged, at all events the fearful determination with which (undeterred by any consequences) she appears on the scene, and the equally fearful, equally reckless energy with which Macbeth pursues to the end the given path—after he has once entered upon it—possess something of that primitive grandeur, that titanic power, arrogance and wildness, by which Shakspeare has not only increased the impression of the tragic pathos, but by which he has also contrived to give a peculiar stamp to the character of the whole drama. This power, while obeying the law, was great and mighty on the road to what was good, but in evil, in all foul deeds, although retaining its outward force, its inner strength, its true support is broken. The evil into which Macbeth and his wife have fallen, in the end destroys itself; in the one case by the terrible mental disease which attacks the lonely, inactive woman, who is left with the horrible fancies of her sensitive imagination, and distracted by her awakening conscience; in the other, by Macbeth's blind confidence in the deceptive oracular speeches of the demoniacal creatures. As the latter were the first to drive the hero into crime, so they also prove the instruments of his punishment, the motives of his downfall. For their activity is nowhere only externally opposed to man, nowhere only a foreign power exercising force over the will. As their flattering promises are rather the concealed wishes of Macbeth's own soul, so their cheering words of consolation represent the cunning self-deception which wrestles in the soul of the criminal, and keeps up his courage by false hopes and delusive sophistries, until finally the deception becomes direct annihilation.

The hardened criminal, who, as such, has no interest but in himself, is, in accordance with his nature, always solitary. Therefore, on the one side we have Macbeth and his wife, on the other—far apart—the nobles, the state, and the people. The progress of the action, accordingly, consists in the necessary and perpetually increasing

beth have not only been formed, but that these various conceptions are possible, that is to say, appear more or less justifiable.

separation of the criminal from the world surrounding him, or, what is the same thing, in the fearful progression, with which the evil swells and grows from incident to incident, from action to action, till it attains its inevitable goal, *i.e.*, ruin and destruction; and also, in the interaction between Macbeth's personal history and that of the whole state. For if Macbeth and his wife are the tragic representatives of the power of human will and energy, in its full force and strength, and if the state is the sphere in which their greatness and power have to be manifested—if it, so to say, is the general, objective, lawfully active force of will and energy which is expressed in right and custom—then both sides must stand in a direct relation to one another. The ideal substance of the tragedy, accordingly, is not only exhibited in a double form, by the actions and fate of the two chief characters—who, though essentially alike are yet different as man and woman—but is, at the same time, also represented in the fate of the whole nation, in the course of the development of the political life. As the inner discord in Macbeth's character (after evil has obtained the upper hand) converts the victorious hero into a contemptible tyrant, a similar contradiction in the organism of the state, changes it, in a corresponding progression, into wild disorder and lawlessness. The development of the one side is, at the same time, the development of the other; both proceed hand in hand. Macbeth could not have acquired the throne of Scotland, nor have maintained himself upon it had not the nobles—the representatives of the state—from want of clear and firm consciousness of what was right, and in wretched indecision and inactivity, neglected their duty. And as Macbeth, even before perpetrating the crime, bore within himself the cause of the crime so, no doubt, the state also was already standing on weak foundations even before Macbeth overthrew it; for the king and the highest dignitaries of the kingdom were wanting in true moral energy, therefore in true political activity. This is proved with certainty by those internal rebellions and external attacks against Duncan's government, to which the poet introduces us at the commencement of the piece. Macbeth's

regicide is, so to say, but the flower and fruit of the mischief which was already fermenting in the interior of the state. It then breaks out externally as well and, while keeping pace with the decay of Macbeth's heroic greatness, continues more and more to develop its destructive power. For this reason the poet places the Scottish nobles—Macduff, Lenox, Rosse, Menteth, Angus, Cathness and their chief Banquo—in contrast to Macbeth, as representatives of the state and people; their mode of action, their at first siding with Macbeth, their treachery towards Malcolm (whom they themselves have acknowledged as the rightful heir to the throne, and now rob of his right upon a mere suspicion), their subsequent wavering and gradual desertion of Macbeth, determine and form the motives of the further course of the action. Malcolm and Donalbain, on the other hand, are the representatives of the royal power, the highest authority of right and morality, from which alone help, cure of the disease, and restoration of order can be expected; accordingly it was necessary that, although sufferers in the general misfortunes, they should be saved from the danger which is threatening them. Thus every one of the dramatic personages have their definite, well founded position in the organism of the whole, and the fate of each individual is dependent upon his position, *i.e.*, upon the relation in which each stands to the principle of all national and political life, of the moral strength of will and action.

It is the living organic development with which the action proceeds from an inner necessity, and is gradually evolved out of the foundation of the whole, out of the characters and given circumstances, that here, as in all Shakspeare's other dramas, constitutes the beauty of the *composition* and reaches its climax in the closing scene of the whole. The catastrophe, the end, is, in fact, only the last point towards which the development incessantly and irresistibly presses forward. As the *action*, from the beginning, is based upon the power and greatness of man's strength of will and energy in its moral significance, but takes a tragic direction on this basis, in consequence of the internal discord in the character of the hero, so the

power of evil—after the original greatness and beauty in Macbeth's heroic nature have succumbed to this contradiction and turned into its opposite—is carried to the highest pitch and manifests itself objectively in the complete disorganisation and helplessness of the whole state, subjectively in the mental disease of Lady Macbeth, and in the delusion, perplexity and despair of Macbeth himself. As in 'King Lear' the whole system of human order and morality collapses with the destruction of the foundation of family life, the same result is produced here by the destruction of the foundation of state life. Evil has gained the supremacy, and the first step towards restoration can, therefore, be made only by the self-destruction of evil. And yet the self-destruction would merely remove the *débris* and ruins, merely clear the ground for a new structure, the edifice itself would not as yet be rebuilt. True help and restoration can proceed only from the positive power of the good, from that truly moral activity which is supported by divine justice and the guiding hand of Providence. This appears to be here represented in the person of the pious and divinely-gifted king of England, whose miraculous power, which spreads its blessing all around, is also called upon to save the neighbouring kingdom from ruin. But as his hand (at whose touch diseases and all ills vanish) is devoted solely to works of peace, it cannot of itself be the scourge of war or wield the sword of vengeance, the positive power of good is, therefore, represented by the noble, pious, heroic Siward and his son, the latter of whom falls a victim to the deliverance of Scotland. By their assistance, Malcolm and Donalbain, together with the other Scottish noblemen, succeed in hurling the tyrant from his bloody throne, and in restoring order and law.

But, it may justly be asked, where, in the course of the action, is the conciliatory, elevating element which, after all, is indispensable to tragedy? Wherein, especially, is the justification, the internal necessity of the downfall of so many innocent persons, whose doings and omissions had no hand in the transgressions and crimes, and whom justice nevertheless finally punishes? As regards the last question the tragic poet—inasmuch as he cannot depict life and

history in its full length and breadth, but can only describe it in an abridged form—must be free to exhibit secondary characters, and also to treat them as mere secondary characters; in other words, he must be allowed to give merely external, objective motives for the fate of such persons as he does not require for the development of the action itself, but simply as actual, external objects for the deeds of his heroes; as regards the subjective basis of their fate—which is and must be contained in their personal characters, their course of life and their mode of thought and action—the poet must be content with giving hints and indications. This Shakspeare does as far as he can without impeding and disturbing the course of the action. The gracious Duncan falls, obviously not without being himself to blame for his fate, for whether the numerous revolts against his government, in the suppression of which Macbeth proved his heroism, were the result of arbitrary rule and injustice, or (as the source from which Shakspeare drew his subject, has it) of unroyal weakness and concession, still, he is open to the reproach, as already said, of not having properly fulfilled his duties as king. His sons are suspected of having slain their father, owing to their precipitate flight, which though prudent, was unmanly, and have, therefore, to suffer banishment. Banquo, in self-complacent conceit, believes in the promises for his future good fortune, and thus brings destruction upon his own head. Macduff's wife and children, lastly, suffer for the thoughtlessness of their natural protector, who, in thinking only of himself and forgetful of his duty as father and husband, leaves them behind to secure his own safety; he is punished by their death, which at the same time is Lady Macduff's punishment for the unloving asperity with which she rails at her husband's conduct, and thus gives us an insight into a marriage which was perhaps also a motive for Macduff's hasty and secret flight. All, however, the whole country as well as the nobility, are also guilty of having, with mean, selfish readiness, submitted to the usurped authority of Macbeth, forgetful of the claim of the rightful heir. And he who weakly complies with evil is justly involved and destroyed by it. An internal necessity, therefore, acting in accordance with ethical motives, runs

through the secondary parts also, and the finer the threads of its power are woven round the whole, the more we are irresistibly seized and fettered by them. This internal necessity becomes one and the same thing as the fundamental idea of the drama, and, accordingly, is not merely reflected in the character, the fortunes and fate of the chief bearers of the action, but is also reflected in various degrees of light and shade in all the other figures. We have the most varied forms of the same disruption, incompleteness, discord and weakness of will and action, and these succumb first in one, then in another way to the inevitable consequences which such a state of things bears within itself. All the dramatic personages take up a certain position in regard to the power of the destiny which governs the whole, to the moral power of will and action which determines the nature and condition of the state, and receive their fate in accordance with this position.

This answer to the second question is, in some measure, also a reply to the first. As the course of the action, so the effect of the tragic pathos, in the present case, is not only found in the history of the hero and his consort, but appears, as it were, halved and assigned to two different sides. Macbeth's death leaves only an overwhelming impression of the deep fall of human greatness; this side is certainly wanting in the conciliatory and elevating element. But this element nevertheless springs indirectly from Macbeth's life and fortunes; it is also found in the second scale which counter-balances the first; but for this very reason it stands in a close relation and interaction with the counterpoise, and although by such a division it loses in force and significance, still it is not wholly wanting. For the misfortunes which Macbeth's crime brings upon all the other persons connected with the action, become a means by which they atone for their own errors, by which their strength of will and energy is aroused and their minds purified, so that in the end they rise up great and powerful, and cast off the unworthy yoke to which they had at first succumbed. This self-destructive influence of evil does not only express the comforting certainty that victory and permanence dwell alone in what is good, but (with the restoration of the state under Malcolm's rule) the action of

itself also puts an end to the tragic discord between the inner claim and the outward right to sovereignty, which was the origin of the whole action. In Malcolm, who has become purified and has risen to true majesty and a royal mind by the tragic pathos which has befallen him, the state receives a ruler who is perfectly worthy of the crown, and fully entitled to it both internally and externally. Still; it is an undeniable defect of the tragedy that the fundamental motive of the action represented, is not fully carried out in the personal character, life and fate of the hero, but, in part, merely in his outward surroundings. The tragedy is evidently intended to represent the deep fall of human greatness and beauty which lie in heroic strength of will and action; it is intended to show us how Macbeth's heroic greatness is unavoidably ruined from want of moral strength, in consequence of its inward contradiction, and of the one-sidedness with which he asserts his personal right to rule, to the injury of all other rights and duties, especially, however, in consequence of his want of self-control in face of the demoniacal power of ambition which is set free by the favour of circumstances and then fanned into a devouring flame. But, in accordance with the idea of tragedy the drama ought, at the same time, to show us how that which is humanly great and noble rises from its deep fall into ideal beauty when purified through suffering. Inasmuch as this elevating and conciliatory element of tragedy is not represented in the person of the hero, but merely in his outward subordinate surroundings (which therefore can excite our sympathy only in a subordinate degree), not only is the effect of the tragic pathos weakened by the division of the elements among various bearers, but it disturbs the formal rounding off of the whole, and the beauty and harmony of the composition.

But for other reasons also, I cannot admit that this tragedy—which most critics place so high—is as great as ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ ‘Hamlet,’ ‘King Lear,’ or ‘Othello.’ Apart from the already noticed defect in the want of clear motives for Lady Macbeth's doings and sufferings, and her relation to her husband, there are other parts which seem to me to stand in no right connection with the whole, owing

to the diffuse and detailed manner in which they are handled; at all events, I miss the wonderful harmony by which, in this respect, most of Shakspeare's other dramas are distinguished. Whether or not the detailed account of the witches' doings under Hecate's direction may—by the deep symbolism which Hebler has proved them to contain—possess a certain significance, still, in my opinion, the scene is too long in comparison with the length of the play, and with the great rapidity with which the action everywhere proceeds. It was not necessary, for the motive of the further development of the action, to have the representation of a large, complex apparatus and all the details of a witch's establishment; it would have been sufficient to have had the answers given to Macbeth's questions, and the spectral apparitions which, at his request, are brought up before him. It also seems to me that the conversation between Malcolm and Macduff, and, in fact, all the part played in England, is again disproportionately diffuse and minute, compared with the main action and its rapid development.

However, Shakspeare's faults are always but more or less like the dark shades produced by a brilliant light. The hurrying rapidity with which the main action proceeds and which does not allow of more detailed motives for the separate moves, corresponds not only with the fundamental plan of the whole—according to which the energy of an heroic power of will and action, amounting to blind thirst for action, forms the fundamental motive of the dramatic development—but this very irresistible hurry and force with which the terrible consequences of the first criminal step fall, blow upon blow without leaving time for any thought—carrying the criminal along from deed to deed like an overflowing torrent—contains a feature of grand beauty, of terrible, demoniacal beauty which gives the tragedy its peculiar character, and conceals a profound thought within its depths. It seems as if the dark evil-brooding powers which pervade the whole, had done away with the usual course of time. And, in fact, it is only the irresistible consistency with which crime follows upon crime that drives men to such blind haste; it is only the rank weeds of evil that can shoot up with such fearful rapidity.

The good action requires time and patience, the truly moral act demands consideration, sure preparation and a calm, collected state of mind. Add to this, that the pressing, rapid movement with which the action hurries on, demands a counterpoise to save the spectator from anguish and confusion. This is probably the reason why Shakspeare has not merely arranged points for resting and stopping, but has also intentionally made Málcolm's hesitating, almost too considerate thoughtfulness, a contrast to Macbeth's violent energy. In what an ingenious manner does Shakspeare, at the same time, represent the two forms in which the will is historically manifested! On the one hand we have the rash act which follows close upon the determination, attaining its object through confusion and intimidation like a hostile inroad; on the other, the careful, all-considerate resolution, which far precedes the action and leads it slowly but surely to its goal. And there is as little need to point out how ingeniously the poet here makes the two principal forms of historical importance play into each other, as to explain how it is that—in spite of the above-mentioned defects—this tragedy, has won the special favour and applause of most critics.

CHAPTER V.

HAMLET.

If the drama is to mirror 'the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure,' it will not only have to reflect the thoughts, tendencies and motives which lie most clearly within view, but will also have to portray such as are mysterious and deeply hidden, and yet determine the fate of men, nations and periods of time. And where the poet has based the course of the action represented, more especially on those motives which slumber in the depths of the soul, the leading thoughts of the representation will, of course, not appear so clear as to prevent there being manifold ways of conceiving and viewing them, although but one of these is the true centre, to which all others are subordinate, and with which they are interwoven.

This remark is specially confirmed by the tragedy of 'Hamlet.' If it is always a difficult matter, in Shakspeare, to penetrate to the first foundation upon which he has erected his great structures, this applies specially to the case now to be discussed. Every new enquirer, who has thought and written on 'Hamlet,' believes that he has at last succeeded in fathoming it; and yet no one has succeeded in satisfactorily solving the æsthetic problem here presented, or of explaining with convincing clearness either the character of Hamlet, and the motives of his conduct, the intentions of the poet, or the connection and internal unity of the complicated drama. The play has been censured on account of this obscurity which hangs over it, and I do not hesitate to acknowledge the defect it implies. But I find an excuse for the poet, on the one hand in the fact that, as has already been intimated, we often enough remain wholly unconscious of the first cause and impulse of our mode of action, and that (particularly in difficult, unusual and complicated positions in life) we

allow, not only indistinct, but even wavering and varying motives. On the other hand, that the mysterious sort of twilight which envelops the play is, so to say, but the shadow which is inseparable from light, in other words, the defect is but the obverse of an excellency; the indistinctness does not rob the drama of the intense interest which this very play has always and invariably created; on the contrary, in my opinion, it contributes considerably towards increasing and deepening the interest. This tragedy, if we look at it as a whole, may be said to lie before us like a moon-lit romantic landscape, traversed by bright rocky peaks and dark ravines, while in the centre is a deep valley partially illuminated by rays of light; what we see irresistibly charms our imagination to fill up and complete what the darkness of night conceals; our eyes rest in deep meditation on the dark portions and are, as it were, kept riveted there till our imagination has finished its work. We rest satisfied with its interpretation in spite of its uncertainty, because we feel that in this case the uncertainty only adds to the charm of the whole, and because we have to confess, that poetry nowhere works for a searching intellect—that born realist—but for the completing and developing power of the imagination.

Goethe—after quoting Hamlet's words: 'The times are out of joint; O, cursed spite! that ever I was born to set them right!'—says: 'These words, it seems to me, contain the key to Hamlet's whole conduct, and it is clear to my mind, that Shakspeare intended to describe a great deed laid upon a soul which was unfit for the task. It is in this sense that I find the whole piece composed. We have here an oak-tree planted in a costly vase which ought only to have borne lovely flowers within its bosom; the roots expand and burst the vase.' A. W. Schlegel, on the other hand, calls the tragedy 'a tragedy of thought, suggested by continual and unsatisfied meditation on the destiny of man, on the dark confusion of the events of this world, and designed to awaken the same meditation in the minds of the spectators.' He thinks that its object was to show how a study which aims at exhausting, to the farthest limits of human foresight, all the contingencies and all the possible consequences of a particular act, must

paralyze the power of energy, as Hamlet himself says in the words (iii. 1):

“Thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.”

Goethe calls Hamlet tender and noble, a born prince, desirous of ruling only in order to give free scope to what is good, of an agreeable exterior, moral by nature, of a kindly disposition, not originally melancholy and pensive, but forced by circumstances to be so; in short, a beautiful, pure and noble, highly moral nature, but without the physical strength which makes the hero, and sinking beneath a weight which he can neither bear nor cast off, to whom every duty is sacred, but the present one too arduous, etc. Schlegel, on the other hand, while granting Hamlet many excellent qualities, accuses him, nevertheless, of weakness of will, a natural predisposition to cunning and dissimulation, want of decision amounting to cowardice, a certain malicious pleasure in the, more accidental than premeditated, ruin of his enemies, also of scepticism and want of firm faith. Goethe, unconsciously makes him a middle-aged Werther; as with the latter, so with Hamlet, the natural weakness of his power of will and energy are said to be at strife with the external powers of unfavourable circumstances, antagonistic to the character of the hero; as in Werther, an excess of sentiment, so in Hamlet a task in excess of his strength, is placed in a vessel which breaks beneath the weight. In both cases, we have a melancholy sadness brooding over the corrupt, unhealthy state of the world. Schlegel, on the other hand, finds Hamlet to be a picture of the German nature at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a youth who has developed into the man, who has turned away from the practical side of life, and lives wholly in the world of his own thoughts, and who cannot bestir himself to undertake the task imposed upon him, because his power of will and energy evaporate in the making of theories, in brooding, in reflection and wavering meditation. Both of these views, however, only mirror the character of their own ages;

yet they are shared by Fr. Horn and a great number of eminent critics more or less modified.

I, on my part, do not think that either Goethe's or Schlegel's conception has hit the main point in the Prince's character. Hamlet, although an exceedingly noble nature is, nevertheless, not Goethe's ideal, but neither does he, although not free from weaknesses, possess the bad qualities Schlegel imputes to him. Each of these opinions is contradicted by features, as clearly expressed as they are essential, in the description given by the poet himself. In the first place, Hamlet is so little wanting in courage and boldness that he might rather be charged with audacity and fool-hardiness, for, without either hesitation or fear, he tears himself violently out of his friends' hands, and follows the ghost to the lonely spot to which it beckons him—although not only Horatio, but a hardened soldier like Marcellus, endeavour to hold him back, because they lack the courage to run the risk. And how can a man be accused of 'want of decision amounting to cowardice,' how can he be denied to possess courage and energy when, in a fight with pirates, he not only is among the foremost in the fight, but alone ventures to board the hostile ship? It is true that Hamlet exhibits this manliness and decision of character, this daring spirit, only in moments of inward excitement, of excessive emotion; but courage that can look death defiantly in the face, is always accompanied by a certain excitement of soul; and in the fight with the pirates the Prince's soul could have been excited only by the danger and pleasure in fighting. This alone can be admitted, that Hamlet himself does not wish, nor approve of blind actions, which proceed only from violent mental emotion; on the contrary, he tries to suppress this inclination which he finds in himself, and where he succeeds in this, his decision does indeed appear slow of action, his energy languid. But this is not *weakness* of will, not *want* of energy, it is only the result of his determination to know his will always guided by *thought*, and of his way of thinking which—in consequence of the innate sensitiveness of his soul—is easily carried away to far-reaching considerations and reflections, and can, therefore, only with difficulty

be concentrated upon what is directly present, what is absolutely necessary. Therefore it is only where mature consideration is required by circumstances, that his will and energy are uncertain, slow, and wanting in freedom.* The charge of a 'natural inclination to 'crooked ways,' appears quite unfounded, and I cannot conceive from what circumstance Schlegel has inferred it. For Hamlet's keeping the ghost's appearance a secret, his assumed madness, and all his scruples about the quick execution of his plan, are well accounted for in the given circumstances and the whole position of affairs. Hamlet has against him all the power of the apparently rightful King of Denmark;† and because he cannot persuade himself to flatter and to play the hypocrite towards his mother and villainous uncle, because, on the other hand, he first wishes to be perfectly convinced about the fearful crime attributed to these, his nearest relatives, he draws the king's suspicions upon himself, and is forced to elude the machinations against his own life by artifice and cunning. Still less does his character exhibit a malignant pleasure in the suffering of others, such as Schegel describes. Hamlet's own words, spoken directly after the death of Polonius (iii. 4)—

"Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune:
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger:"

and again—

*
"For this same lord
I do repent"—

* The opinion that Hamlet is by no means wanting in courage, energy, and manliness—which opinion, as far as I know, I first maintained in opposition to Goethe and Schlegel—is now shared by Rötischer, Gehrt, von Friesen, Rossmann, Hebler, Rümelin, K. Köstlin, Tschischwitz, Genée, and others. That Vischer's artificial, and, in its minuteness, very complicate view of Hamlet's character, in reality amounts to a contradiction has, in my opinion, been clearly proved by Hebler (p. 125 f.).

† That the king, as Gervinus thinks, has, by his crime, at the same time robbed Hamlet of his 'right' to the crown, is nowhere said in the play itself. Saxo and Belleforest, also, do not represent the matter in this light; according to them, as according to Shakspeare, Hamlet's uncle appears legally entitled to be sovereign.

breathe rather of sorrow and compassion for his rash act. And although he does not express any great regret concerning the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—those puppets in his detestable uncle's hands—this surely cannot be supposed to be a proof of malignant pleasure in the suffering of others. Lastly, Hamlet is certainly meditative and thoughtful, but he has not by any means fallen into scepticism and infidelity. The passage to which Schlegel refers has evidently been intentionally or unintentionally misunderstood. Hamlet (ii. 2) does certainly say: 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so;' however, from the context it is plain that he is not speaking of what is *morally* good and bad, but merely of *outward* good and evil, and the estimate of them surely depends everywhere upon the mind and disposition of man.*

Hamlet—as I think—is by nature of an artistic, or if it be preferred, of a philosophical turn of mind. This is the general foundation of his character. Like all minds poetically disposed, like all persons with a lively interest for art and knowledge, for mental culture, we find in him an earnest striving and a profound mind, naturally given to meditation and reflection, combined with a quickly aroused excitability of feeling and imagination, a delicate, sensitive nature, and an elasticity of reflection which, in moments of excitement—as already said—carry him involuntarily beyond the object in question, beyond the goal at which he is aiming; thus bringing things, which in reality stand in distant relation to him, into his immediate proximity. Shakspeare places special emphasis upon Hamlet's taste and love for poetry, his intimate acquaintance with the dramatic poetry of his age, his

* I quote the passage as a proof how a false conception of the whole can lead, an otherwise sound reason, to form erroneous notions of single passages (ii. 2) :

"*Haml.* Denmark's a prison.

"*Ros.* Then is the world one.

"*Haml.* A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons; Denmark being one of the worst.

"*Ros.* We think not so, my lord.

"*Haml.* Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison," etc.

fine judgment in regard to the object of the drama and the art of its representation, as is proved by his conversation with the Players. Express emphasis is also placed on Hamlet's aversion, anger and contempt in regard to all untruth, hypocrisy, pretence, and falsehood, in regard to a smooth varnished appearance, as well as regards all want of culture, uncouthness and vulgarity; in other words, the poet emphasises in him that feeling for truth which is so closely connected with the feeling for beauty, and which every artist, poet and critic must possess, because it is the fundamental condition of his work. Shakspeare expressly states that Hamlet has studied in Wittenberg, and that, although thirty years of age, he cherishes the hope of returning thither to continue his studies. He expressly remarks that Horatio, Hamlet's bosom friend, to whom he is deeply and sincerely attached, is a 'scholar.' Everywhere, on every page, and on every line, the poet continually reminds us of Hamlet's own lofty mental culture, his eminent intelligence, his clear judgment, the acuteness and profundity of his reflections on the nature of man, the object of life, and the problems of art and philosophy. And yet Hamlet is by nature neither artist, poet nor philosopher; for this he obviously lacks the specific talent. But in the fundamental elements of his nature he does possess the talent, the power, and, consequently, also the desire to work towards the attainment of something *great*, to work in accordance with his *own thoughts*, in that *independent, creative* activity which lies above the manifold domains of practical life. The strong desire in *this* way to prove the nobility of his soul—which is enthusiastic for all that is good and beautiful—is the main-spring of his life, the clue to his aims and actions. This fundamental feature of his inner nature has, during his youth, perfectly corresponded with the development of his outward existence. Growing up under the eyes of a noble, royal father, and being the heir to a mighty realm, he—in the sure prospect of free, regal power, which comes nearest to his ideal of human power and dignity, such as is possible only to princes—has given himself up wholly to the inward bent of his mind. Not originally inclined to sadness and melancholy, he seems, in accord

ance with the very fortunate position of his external circumstances, to have cherished a happy view of life, even though he always was observant, pensive and of a reflective turn of mind. This is attested by his fondness of, and natural turn for humour and wit, for sarcastic puns and points, which he has evidently taken pleasure in developing, and cannot suppress even in his deep grief at the heavy calamities that have suddenly come upon him and destroyed both his inner and outer life; it is now, however, expressed more in the form of deeply meditative, incisive humour. In consequence of his desire to cultivate his independent mind (which strives for things beyond ordinary human limits), and to enlighten it with new, world-reforming ideas, he went to the university of *Wittenberg*, the name of which, in those days—as already said—symbolically denoted the upward rise of the mind, the morning of a new mental energy, and the highest summit of the mental culture of the age. On his return thence, he and his manly *striving* for culture and grand actions meets in Ophelia with the peaceful *existence* of a noble woman, the calm self-sufficiency of a delicate, beautiful, maidenly soul; he has given himself up in love to her, for in her he has found the complementary half of his own being; by her side he hopes to receive the reward of his future endeavours, and that of his creative activity. This Hamlet *was* before the death of his father, or rather this *is* Hamlet in the original and undisturbed state of his nature. And for this very reason it is decidedly against his natural disposition to commit an act which is *demanded* only by external circumstances, and which is internally foreign to him; any such act—even though it did not bear within itself the weighty and ruinous importance of a decisive sentence against an uncle and a mother, and in no way surpassed the degree of his power—he would nevertheless have undertaken only against his will. It is not the want of power and ability, not weakness of will and resolution, but the *nature* of the deed imposed upon him, which deters him. Ophelia's praise, when she calls him (iii. 1):

“The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,”

and thus credits him with heroism and manly energy, can scarcely be understood simply in the sense in which the loving maiden takes it; but as little can it be supposed to be mere self-delusion when, in act iv. 4, he says of himself, that he has the will, strength and means to do the thing he has to do. For the quite impartial Fortinbras passes an equally favourable judgment upon him when, at the end of the play (v. 2), he says:

"Let four captains
Bear Hamlet, like a *soldier*, to the stage;
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have prov'd *most royally*!"

Hamlet possesses all the good qualities which Goethe attributes to him, with one virtue and one fault in addition: the desire and the honest endeavour in all cases to remain self-possessed and complete master of himself, and to govern his whole life by the power of free thought, according to his aims and resolutions, but without having the ability in all cases to maintain this supremacy. How deeply grieved he appears (v. 2) for having forgotten himself at Ophelia's grave with Laertes, and how earnestly in his interview with his mother (iii. 1) does he endeavour to restrain himself, for fear of being carried away by the excitement into which he is thrown! How resolutely he casts away from himself everything of a passionate nature; how highly he praises the power of self-control as the greatest ornament in man, when he says to Horatio (iii. 2):

"Bless'd are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well co-mingled
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please: Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee."

With all his strength, therefore, he strives to become master of the circumstances which oppress him; with all his might he struggles to raise himself above the position assigned to him by fate, to control, to *free* himself from the task offered or rather forced upon him by his position in life, and to produce *independent* works. He

strives, from an inward impulse, to become his own ideal of man, of whom he says (ii. 2): 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in *action*, how like an *angel*! in *apprehension*, how like a *god*!' But just because it is, therefore, repugnant to his nature to strive merely according to circumstances and opportunities, merely on account of external necessity, there arises a contradiction between the inward bias of his mind and the pressure of external circumstances. He cannot make up his mind to perform the task assigned to him, not because it is too great or too difficult for him, but because he does not know how to turn a mere external action into one that is *internal, free, and truly moral*. Hence his restless vacillation, his hesitation and procrastination, his wavering thoughts, his coming forward and retiring, the vehement self-reproach with which he would goad himself on to prompt action, without, however, being able to control time and its flight; hence the uncertainty and the contradictions in his mode of action, and apparently also in his character.

And in fact, the task imposed upon Hamlet gives him much, very much to reflect upon, both with regard to the *actual* crime which it is to punish, and also with regard to its *moral* side, *i.e.*, to the question of right and wrong. The ghost of his father appears. Hamlet's very address to it is in perfect accordance with his character:

"What may this mean
That thou, dead corse, again, in complete steel,
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous; and we fools of nature
So horribly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?"

When the horrible crime is revealed to him, he does not at once abandon himself to feelings of revenge, or to his impulse to act; he is, it is true, in a state of passionate excitement and deeply moved, but the occurrence has rather yet to become an inward experience to him; surprised and astonished that that has happened which he had considered impossible, he resolves to 'set it down that one may smile and smile, and be a villain.' After having

thereby endeavoured to control his violent excitement—for, although it has been found strange, the 'setting it down' does help him in this—he at once determines not to act without further proofs, but, in some way to assure himself of the truth of the matter, and clearly to think over his own mode of action. This is why he entreats his friends to be silent, even though his conduct should hereafter appear strange or odd. The conduct he does assume, the half-madness, the unreality of which, however, it is not difficult to perceive, would be very inappropriate if he had contemplated the rash act from the beginning. But he assumes it only with the view of awakening in the King's mind a suspicion as if he guessed, suspected or knew something of the truth, and then drew a conclusion as to the King's guilt or innocence from his behaviour. Hamlet finds it easy to carry out his plan; for although it is assuredly only a part which he involuntarily undertakes to play,* without having any clear notion as to how he intends to act (being driven on by the dark instinct of his excited, anxious mind, which is struggling for certainty and clearness), still his mind is so affected, so confused and disturbed by the appearance of the ghost, by the fearful subject of the secret disclosed to him, by the necessity of having to bear the whole weight alone, by the melancholy loneliness which thus suddenly surrounds him and which must be the more detrimental to his mind the more it is only internal and mental, especially, however, by the fruitless endeavour (which continues to force itself upon him) to make himself complete master of the new position in life into which he has suddenly been placed, *i.e.*, to become assimilated with it and to transform his view of life in accordance with it—in short, to create for himself a

* The opposite view, held by some Englishmen, that Hamlet is *actually* insane, must of necessity be an error, apart from the clear proofs contained in several passages, because this would in fact unhinge the whole tragedy, and entirely destroy the impression of the tragic pathos; in short, the view is thoroughly unpoetical. It would be no artistic work, but a senseless contradiction, to let a mind, already disturbed to the very brink of madness, in addition pass through all the sufferings of a deeply tragic situation. Such a sight is neither beautiful nor sublime, not even attractive or interesting, but simply intolerable.

new existence out of the desolate ruins of the former world of his thoughts, plans, wishes and hopes (which a single flash has suddenly dashed to pieces), all this has so upset his mind, that he is not exactly deranged, but yet stands, so to say, on the borders between disease and health. His undertaking to play this part is certainly based upon a half belief, or, if it be preferred, a disbelief in the words of the ghost, and this disbelief might be regarded as scepticism (*Bedenklichkeitskramerei*) were it not that the whole drama is expressly founded on the higher moral doctrines of *Christianity*, as is expressly shown in the very first scene. According to the ideas of true, pure morality, it cannot be an entirely innocent and heavenly spirit that would wander on earth to demand a son to *avenge* his death, and, in fact, the ghost himself says, that he is

“Doom’d for a certain term to walk the night;
And for the day, confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes, done in my days of nature,
Are burn’d and purg’d away.”

Besides this, it is above all things essential to a free, independent action, that the agent should be perfectly certain of its origin and reason. When, therefore, Hamlet finds that he has, and must do the deed so repulsive to him, he intends, at all events, to be perfectly sure that he does not himself commit a crime; this certainty, and, moreover, a certainty in the full extent, is a necessity not merely to him, but to every person with a delicate sense of moral feeling. But when he and Horatio have—by the device of the play—come to a perfect conviction of the King’s guilt, and when the King, by his conduct, has aroused the suspicions of the whole assembled court, why—it has been asked—why does not Hamlet seize the opportunity to unmask the trembling and conscience-stricken criminal, and call him to account? In the first place, probably, because it was only in Hamlet’s eyes, not in those of the others, that the King stood convicted; further, because the King withdraws so hurriedly and suddenly, that Hamlet could not at the moment take him to task; lastly, however, because Hamlet himself has fallen into such passionate excitement at the discovery of the true state of things, that at the moment, he does not in

any way think of taking active steps, and would not have been able to do so, even though he had previously formed a definite plan of action. This, however, he has evidently not done, and for this very reason has been censured and accused of weakness of will, indecision and incapacity of action. But before making a plan for action, one has to be certain of the action itself, and this Hamlet is not. Moreover, even after he has come to the firm conviction of the King's guilt, he still hesitates and cannot come to a decision, he still has doubts and scruples, especially *moral* doubts, *moral* scruples! And very rightly. For even though the King were a triple fratricide, it would—according to the idea of pure, strict morality—still remain a morally equivocal act, half a crime to put him to death on the spot without a fair trial; to a tender conscience the murder of an uncle and stepfather is a deed from which the strongest mind would justly revolt, even though divine justice itself required the punishment (and in the present case this could be done only by Hamlet). The higher moral feeling in Hamlet, accordingly, is still in conflict with the natural man and his demand for revenge, which is supported by the ancient national custom of the Germanic people. The natural man spurs him to the deed and accuses him of irresolution and cowardice; his tender conscience—more sentiment than clear consciousness—involuntarily restrains him; his mind wavers and hesitates, and torments itself in vain to reconcile these conflicting elements, but is urged on by them to preserve for itself the creative freedom of action. The regard for the eternal salvation of his soul (to which he significantly refers even at the appearance of the ghost) forces him to halt and to consider; the remembrance of the duty of revenge imposed upon him by his father urges him onwards; therefore the passage which Schlegel quotes (but mutilates to support his view) correctly characterises the real state of Hamlet's soul (iii. 1):

“To die ;—to sleep ;—

To sleep ! perchance to dream ; ay, there's the rub ;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. . . .

* * * * *

*Thus conscience does make cowards of us all :
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, etc.* "*

His, therefore, is no sceptical, idly speculative consideration which wishes to fathom all the possible consequences of the deed; it is his *conscience* and the desire for *free* action in accordance with his own thoughts, that paralyses his energy. And his exclamation:

"The time is out of joint; O cursed spite!
That ever I was born to set it right!"

is not made in the feeling of want of heroism and power of energy (as Goethe thinks), but in his consciousness of the scrupulousness and the tendency of his nature.†

But it is not merely the moral question as to *whether* he should do the deed, it is also the *how* that vexes his soul, as is distinctly expressed in the above monologue (iii. 1). If the deed is to be done, it must be accomplished in an appropriate *form*, expressive of its meaning, and be in accordance with the demands of justice and morality. In the present case also, things prove themselves both obstinate and hard to deal with; here also the whole position of affairs is hostile to him. ¶ In the given circumstances there remains nothing for him to do, but to commit a cunning and treacherous murder, or to rouse the people to rebellion against the externally lawful power of the king—a mode of action utterly abhorrent to his inmost soul. For it is a mere vague supposition that Hamlet—by openly coming forward as the king's accuser and judge, and by being wholly absorbed with his (legally un-

* Hamlet calls the future state an 'undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns.' This is said to be a contradiction, as he has just experienced the reverse, and seen and spoken to the spirit of his father. Hamlet, however, means to say that no one is at liberty to return here from the 'undiscovered country' if the life there does not please him, and therefore that suicide determines all futurity.

† That Hamlet's 'fine moral feeling,' his 'scrupulousness and virtue,' are the fundamental reasons of his hesitation and irresolution, is expressly recognised by Gervinus. But if so, Hamlet has a *right* to hesitate, to reflect and to consider, and it is, therefore, a contradiction to praise his scrupulousness and in the same breath to accuse him of irresolution, scepticism, and cowardice.

demonstrable) imputation of the fratricide—would have immediately won the sympathy of the Court and army, of the nobles and the people. On the contrary it would have been very easy for the cunning king—in spite of his certainly strange behaviour after the play—to weaken the accusation and to represent it as a delusion of the diseased and melancholy state of Hamlet's mind, of which, moreover, he had already given signs even before the appearance of the ghost. The fact of Hamlet's not venturing upon such an open action, in face of a result which, to say the least of it, was extremely doubtful, is by no means a proof of 'awkwardness' in practical matters, nor of weakness of will or of judgment. Again, therefore, he stands hesitating and considering; nay, he willingly follows the order to go to England, evidently in the hope of there obtaining the means and opportunity (perhaps by England's support in money and men to engage in an honourable, open warfare against his uncle) to set about his task in a manner worthy both of himself and of its own importance. This hope he evidently alludes to in the words (iii. 4):

"For 'tis the sport, to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar: and 't shall go hard,
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon."

An accident frustrates his plans. He has to return to Denmark against his own wish, and although he has now, at last, come to a firm decision, still not any one of the subsequent events is brought about through him, by his own independent activity, or in accordance with his own wish and resolution. It is only at the last moment (when he himself is at the point of death and surrounded by fresh crimes on the part of the king), but forced more by circumstances than his own free will, that, with a rapid movement he stabs the king, and then expires himself with a sigh over the weakness of human nature.

The drama is thus certainly a tragedy of *thought*, but in a different sense from that of A. W. Schlegel.* Shakspeare here conceives the principle and basis of human life—i.e., the chief motive of the historical development

* See page 480.

—to be that which is highest and noblest in man : thought in its relation to action, in its freedom and independent, creative power, which makes the outer world the expression of its substance. (Shakspeare's tragic Muse rises from the family circle, and further from political life, out of the domain of the impulses and passions, of the strength of will and energy, into the highest region of free, purely mental activity; here the drama takes its stand, and exhibits its tragic picture of life from this point of view. Hamlet's mind, which is as noble as it is strong and sterling, in fact, as great as it is possible for the human mind to become, struggles continually to acquire that sovereignty which is to maintain the mastery of thought over the will, over the course and the formation of human life.) And yet he does not succeed in attaining his aim; he does not possess sufficient strength to control external circumstances; his own weakness and hesitation—supported as they are by the force of highly unfavourable relations—drive him perpetually from his path; unforeseen events frustrate his plans. For, on the one hand, his mind, in spite of its depth, greatness and power, is, nevertheless, still wholly biassed in the contradiction of self-possessed activity with blind impulses, of free thought with unfree passion, of a morally necessary resolve with an arbitrary, accidental inclination. He does not, as yet, by any means, stand upon that height of moral strength and firmness of character, of perfect self-control and self-knowledge, which is the first indispensable condition of that grand, ideal activity of which Hamlet has dreamt, and which continually floats before his soul. On the other hand, this aspiration in its one-sidedness—by wishing of its own supreme power to rule and form all life—surpasses the measure of human power, and borders upon that arrogant desire which would wish to rid itself of the guiding hand of history, and to be in action 'like an angel,' in apprehension 'like a god.' Man certainly ought not to pursue his path in life according to blind instinct, but according to free and conscious thought. However, that which he strives for must not be *his* thought, not *his* pleasure, not *his* will; it must be the substance of the divine order of the universe, the thought and will of the moral necessity

according to which he acts, by making it voluntarily his own. • Hamlet's aversion to the deed imposed upon him, his dissatisfaction with the task in life allotted to him, his striving—not merely to form a given substance (the one thing in a man's power) but to create it for himself, or at least to be the autocrat master of it—has in it something of selfish despotism and arbitrariness. At all events, that fundamental tendency of his nature for free, self-sufficient activity manifests itself in so one-sided a manner that, being engrossed in it, he takes no heed of the other agent of history, of that which is called the power of circumstances, *i.e.*, of the inner necessity of the course of the world's history, existing in the Past and in its relations of the Present. He, indeed, recognises the task as the result of it and as necessarily falling to his lot, and sees that he must undertake it; but, on the other hand, that feeling of aversion to it in his inmost nature unconsciously and involuntarily asserts itself; and hence, in reality, he has no serious intention of fulfilling the task. He does not, it is true, become clearly conscious that, in reality, he has no intention to undertake it, and merely evades it, but this is actually the state of the case. This, moreover, explains the strange contradiction that he not only accredits himself (and indeed most justly) with possessing the strength and the will to do what he has to do, but that he complains of, and makes himself the bitterest reproaches in regard to his hesitation, and (most unjustly) accuses himself of cowardice and want of feeling, and yet never succeeds in accomplishing what he demands of himself and what he is very well able to perform. This internal contradiction, which has its root in want of self-control and knowledge of self, becomes the subjective motive of the tragic pathos to which Hamlet's great and noble mind succumbs. In yielding to that inward impulse (which gives rise to his aversion to the task imposed upon him) he acts, wherever he does act, *not* in accordance with his own thought, in free self-possessed activity, but is carried away by passion or the impulse of the moment. In the first tumult of his feelings and without any sufficient reason, he throws aside Ophelia's love, which he himself had fostered and nourished; with inconsiderate rashness

he murders old Polonius instead of the King, and thus brings upon himself the blame of Ophelia's madness and death; with only an uncertain hope in view, he consents to undertake the journey to England, in consequence of which he finds himself obliged to deliver up Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their fate; they are miserable creatures, it is true, but still merely unconscious instruments in the hands of their master and king. On account of this he himself meets with a tragic fate, which overtakes him so suddenly and unexpectedly that he has barely time, in great haste, to do the long contemplated deed.

The actions and sentiments of all the other characters harmonise with the character and fortunes of Hamlet, the principal representative of the action and its tragic course: we have everywhere the same idea, but in a variety of shades and colours. Laertes is the contrast and *pendant* to Hamlet. The position of both is pretty much the same; he too has to avenge the death of a father and of a sister. But his soul is at once roused into the heat of passion; his will storms into action without deliberation, without asking about right and wrong, and it is only with difficulty that the King, with persuasive eloquence, succeeds in pacifying him and in making him think of artifice and dissimulation; in this, however, he meets his own ruin, contrary to the plan proposed. For this mode of action, excluding as it does all reflection and consideration, and appointing the bare will as master, is as little right and true as Hamlet's contradictory behaviour.* The King, on the other hand, is nothing but hypocrisy and dissimulation, a most clever actor, always master of his looks and gestures, of his words and actions; his criminal doings are invariably based upon well-considered, well-appointed plans; he too—although in a perfectly different sense—always endeavours to direct the course of events and the development of circumstances, in accordance with his own ideas and designs.

* If Shakspeare has not made Laertes the *contrast*, but—as Gervinus thinks—the *prototype* of Hamlet, why is not his mode of action made to appear crowned with success, why is he too rather connected with the tragic fate of all the dramatic persons? Obviously because Shakspeare did not entertain the same view and conception as his interpreter.

And yet the result is the same, the same fruitless endeavours, except that in this case the failure is a consequence of the worthlessness of the character, of criminal disposition of mind, which in the end is caught in its own trap.

But it is not only the noble aspirations of a lofty, free spirit, not merely the intentions of the rash energy of a young man, and the secret plots of a hardened wretch that fall victims to the tragic pathos, the same fate befalls the pretentious wisdom of an old man of the world (who has grown old amidst the scandals and intrigues of the court), and also crushes the dreamy thoughts of a maiden's heart which is wrapped up in love and in the pleasure of loving. Polonius, who appears better and wiser than he is — but whose self-sufficient display of wisdom is only a reflex of the shallow, lax morality of Court life, which aims at external appearance — pays the penalty of the foolish inquisitiveness and the vain conceit with which he interferes in everything, and fancies himself able to fathom and manage all things. Ophelia's mind is disturbed by the sudden destruction of all her bright dreams, which also inquisitively flew far in advance of the present. Ophelia, in many respects, has the same nature and meets with the same fate as Hamlet; she is his female counterpart. Her character, too, admits of being disputed; she, too, does not act, less even than Hamlet, but she also speaks so little that she stands by the side of the action more in the form of a spectator. Yet this very silence is characteristic: Ophelia is one of those meditative, dreamily reserved female natures, with deep feelings and a sensitive imagination, but with no acuteness of intellect and clear self-consciousness, which are therefore incapable of expressing what affects them; they live only in their own hearts, and, so to say, upon their own hearts. This meditative, dreamy nature has attracted Hamlet, it harmonises with the principal side of his character. He has sued for her heart, has won it, and, as she has hitherto lived only in her own heart, she now lives only in him, in the silent, longing hope that he will belong to her. Incapable of resisting, she submits obediently, it is true, and apparently with calmness and composure, to her father's commands, but the more tightly she locks her love up within her breast, the deeper it

engraves itself upon her soul, the more exclusively do all her thoughts gather round this centre of her life. It is this love which first brings the tender, virgin bud to blossom; but her peaceful existence, which is in perfect harmony with itself, is thus broken by the anxiety of longing and desire, the discord of hope and fear. In her maidenly loneliness, in her lively imagination, she has formed a picture of a happiness by Hamlet's side which—like the throne and the royal crown—extends far beyond her horizon, and not only surpasses the degree of her external circumstances, but also of her own inner being. She too, therefore, has made a plan of what her life by Hamlet's side is to be, or rather she has dreamt it out for herself, and this dream has taken such deep root in her soul, and become so entirely a part of her existence and being, that its hopeless destruction upsets her nature and disturbs her consciousness. How deeply and intensely her mind's eye has been rivetted on this happiness by Hamlet's side, how exclusively it has become the centre of her thoughts, the gravitating point of her life she, indeed, nowhere expressly declares—perhaps because she was herself not wholly aware of it, perhaps because maidenly shyness sealed her lips—but the speeches and songs which insanity puts in her mouth, show us the more clearly how deeply her soul was imbued with the dream of love and love's joy. Even the time and motive of her mental derangement is a clear proof of this. She is able to bear that Hamlet, in his assumed madness, should turn from her, for madness is curable and, consequently, hope has not vanished altogether; but that her father should be murdered by him—which raises an insurmountable barrier between her and her love's happiness—this terrible certainty completely deranges her mind, and disturbs the equilibrium of her life and consciousness. Accordingly, Ophelia's madness—which, in the weaker woman's soul, is the same thing as is expressed by the great disturbance of Hamlet's mind—is the climax of the tragic pathos on the inner psychological side of the action, whereas the same is exhibited on the external, historical side, by the ruin of the Royal House of Denmark, by the insurrection of the people under Laertes, and by the disorder of the whole state which is therein manifested.

By the side of Ophelia stands the Queen, whom womanly weakness has made a criminal, and who has allowed herself to be talked over, cozened and made a fool of by a man. She must be classed in the same category with the weak, irresolute courtiers, Rosenerantz and Guildenstern, who, it is true, do not act of their own accord, but yet for the sake of their own interests, and in order to obtain power, authority and a sphere of action, become the tools for carrying out the plans and thoughts of others. This allowing others to make use of one—which, after all, proceeds from self-determination—is but another and baser form of thinking and acting for oneself, and accordingly, is not even destroyed by a foreign and hostile power of will and action, but by the playful caprice of small accidents. Opposed to these personages stands *Horatio*, an inner organic contrast to all. He alone has *no* intentions, has no wish to make his life of profit to himself, but rather devotes himself entirely and unreservedly to his friend. And on this very account he obtains that which all the others seek for in vain. For it is certain that Fortinbras—the young, new king, who is unacquainted with the circumstances of his kingdom—will call upon him (the friend of Hamlet) whom the dying heir to the throne has appointed as his defender and representative, to reorganise the disordered state by grand actions. *Horatio*, therefore, is by no means a superfluous character, by no means a mere subordinate figure, but one of the organic members of the whole. The same may be said of Fortinbras; he, as it were, completes the dramatic function of *Horatio*, for while the latter appears by nature destined more to be the stay and support of others, than to act upon his own account, Fortinbras represents that firm, self-possessed power of action which always takes into consideration the prevailing circumstances, but is active nevertheless, and alone succeeds in attaining its end. For this reason the poet introduces him at the very commencement—even though in the back-ground—and does not lose sight of him till he takes up his position in front as the representative of the future. Thus all the characters are fully entitled to consideration and have their independent significance all those that act independently

perish, either owing to the one-sidedness and uncertainty, the weakness, the falseness, arrogance and conceit of their thoughts, or owing to the selfish determinateness of their will, by means of which they seek to control life. With justice, therefore, does Horatio at the conclusion—while intimating the fundamental idea of the drama, which has been worked out in such manifold ways—say (v. 2):

“And let me speak to the yet unknowing world,
How these things came about: so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts;
Of *accidental* judgments, *casual* slaughters;
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause;
And, in this upshot, *purposes mistook*,
Fall'n on the inventors' heads: all this can I
Truly deliver.”

The various groups which the poet required for carrying out his intentions, in this case also interact with, and counteract one another easily and naturally—as every one must perceive without being specially reminded of the fact. This results spontaneously, as everywhere in Shakspeare, in the well-arranged and progressive course of the action in a definite direction. It proceeds from a double contradiction: on the one hand, from that internal contradiction in Hamlet's character, between his striving after a free, self-conscious and self-chosen sphere of action, and the unfree vehemence, indiscreetness and passionateness of his temperament, which perpetually thwarts this striving; on the other hand, from the external contradiction between the character of the hero and the power of circumstances, which impose upon him a deed which, although appearing substantially and morally necessary, is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible to bring into a free, moral form. The reconciliation of this double contradiction is, so to say, the problem which the action has to solve, and which, therefore, the poet presents to us in the first act, in the exposition, although not with sufficient clearness and distinctness. The following acts show how the hero falls in his vain attempt to solve the discord; in other words, the action removes the contradiction in a *tragic* manner, by showing how the striving after an absolute, creative independence of action (by which Hamlet falls into con-

tradiction with his position in life, owing to the inner contradiction in his own nature) is not only unable to attain its object, but that, on the contrary, it even throws the person into the directly opposite extreme of an arbitrary, unconscious mode of action, making him a slave to blind passion and caprice, in which position he commits actions that make his tragic death appear both a just and necessary consequence. The purport of the action is to give motives for the tragic death and the purification of the hero, in and through himself. The principal incidents of these are: Hamlet's conduct after the discovery of the crime upon which everything turns, the play within the play and its first consequences, the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia, the return of Laertes and his stormy proceedings. The significance of these I have already endeavoured to point out, at least I have already intimated how their internal necessity is determined by the aims and objects of the whole representation, by the given characters and circumstances. This internal necessity in the course of the dramatic development—which, in my opinion, is reflected in every turn of the action, in all of the characters and in all the various parts of the whole—constitutes, in the present case again, the beauty and finish of the composition, and I have no hesitation, even in this respect, in placing this extremely involved and complicated tragedy by the side of the grandest creations of the great poet; yet it has frequently enough been censured on account of supposed defective composition.

Only a few separate points may be somewhat more closely examined. In the first place, after the above disquisition, we doubtless scarcely need to defend Shakspeare against the reproaches that have been raised against him (even by Goethe), for having in the last acts unnecessarily entangled and spun out the course of the action by Hamlet's journey to England, his adventures at sea, his return, etc. It is true that this does affect the *external* composition—the general view of the subject-matter, the rapidity of the progress of the action, the clearness of the development and the certainty of its final object—and if this had been declared a defect, the objection would be justified from the stand-point of æsthetic conformity

to rule. But the external conformity to rule is not always one and the same thing as the highest aims of art, its law is frequently supplanted by higher laws. These laws demand that the external composition shall in all cases be directed towards the internal principles and objects of the drama; accordingly, it must not fear the appearance of an imperfection, if the latter serves to express and to realize the fundamental idea of the whole. It is in this way that the seeming defect becomes an excellence. And it cannot be denied that, from this point of view, the deviations just spoken of, appear well-founded, when it is considered that the purpose of the piece is to show how the self-made thoughts, hopes, and intentions of man, miss their mark, not only on account of their own short-sightedness, but that by an internal necessity their unfounded suppositions are thwarted and disturbed by the equally baseless empire of chance. In 'Hamlet' a great variety of complicated relations and events had to be exhibited, because it is only in a state of complication such as this, that the impotence of the human mind to shape life merely in accordance with a subjective standard, with the desire and inclination, can be manifested. It was intended that the spectator himself should be overwhelmed, stupefied and bewildered by it, and that he should himself thus become directly aware of similar weaknesses and uncertainty in himself. The same reason, and not, as might be supposed, mere theatrical effect, accounts for Shakspeare's introducing the ghost; this is done partly in order to bring the secret crime within view by a single flash of light, partly in order, in the most effective manner to furnish the strongest motive that could be devised for Hamlet's actions, and thereby to heighten the conflict between the given circumstances and Hamlet's character. The same reason, lastly, induced the poet to place folly and madness in such close juxtaposition with the shrewdest intellect, the most remarkable wealth of mind and the most profound reflection. While Ophelia's mental derangement and the disturbed state of Hamlet's mind, reveal what is terrible and ruinous, old Polonius' hollow wisdom, which in reality is only concealed folly, exhibits more of that foolishness and perversity which is contained

in the fruitless endeavour to acquire the perfect sovereignty of thought over circumstances and events. This is still more apparent in the scene with the grave-diggers; it demonstrates, as it were, *in oculis*, the powerlessness of this endeavour and the presumption contained in it, by pointing out how the inquisitive mind in its pride of intellect—while wishing freely and boldly to direct the whole course of life—is not even capable of saving itself from the teeth of the small, busy worms. The riddles of the two merry clowns with their broad humour, is a parody on the great toil and trouble which the mind imposes upon itself in order to soar up to that giddy height upon which, after all, it cannot maintain itself. How significant also is the connection between this scene and that where Hamlet meets Laertes at Ophelia's grave; how significant is Hamlet's direct fall from his philosophical height, from his profound reflections into passionate ardour and want of self-possession! In my opinion, therefore, even this scene has its full poetical justification and is by no means disturbing or superfluous.

Equally unjust, lastly, are the objections raised against the closing scene. The motives of the sudden and unexpected solution of the complication—which is occasioned more by accident than by premeditated intrigue—have already been pointed out. But in addition to this, objection has also been made to the introduction of Fortinbras (although preparation is already made for his appearance in the very first act); it has been regarded as a purely external, arbitrary and meaningless piece of ornamentation, stuck on to the story only in order to give the conclusion a striking effect. But apart from the fact that, as already remarked, Fortinbras forms the complementary *pendant* to Horatio, and that both in their mode of thought and action represent the necessary organic contrast to Hamlet and the other dramatic characters, Shakspeare is justly fond of concluding his overpowering tragedies with the prospect of a new and better state of things which rises up out of suffering, ruin and death. As in 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'King Lear' and 'Macbeth,' so it is here. It is the elevating, conciliatory power of the tragic, which is manifested not merely in the purification and sublimation

of the tragic characters, but also in the blessing and peace which springs up out of the storm and tempest for the survivors and coming generations. When Hamlet has fought and struggled so long, that—in giving up his grand endeavour—he finally perceives (v. 2) :

“ There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will,”

when he has thus acknowledged the internal necessity in the course of the historical events, from which he tried to escape, and is now finally prepared to relinquish what he does not possess ; when his mind is at rest, the disturbance of his mind at an end, and the stormy vehemence of his temperament overcome, *i.e.*, when the contradiction out of which the action proceeded is solved—at first towards the inner side, in the mind and character of the hero, and then externally by the violent death of the guilty King and Queen,—and when the task of revenge imposed upon the hero is accomplished—more by the hand of Providence in the form of accident than by Hamlet’s free action—*i.e.*, when the fearful deed upon which the drama turns is finally accomplished in that form which alone corresponds with its substance—Hamlet then dies in the calm hope of a better existence. He dies not only—as his last words to Horatio imply—with the firm conviction of receiving pardon from Heaven, but also in the certainty that his beloved Denmark is about to see happier times. The elevating, conciliatory element of the tragic pathos lies indeed more especially in the purification, the sublimation of the hero, as reflected in Hamlet’s resignation and self-denial which are based upon purely moral motives. But for this very reason the prospect of a better future for the whole country—which is represented in the person of young Fortinbras and springs up from the downfall of the old royal house—must not be wanting if its downfall and more especially the death of its last, noble scion (who has been swept along by a tragic fate), is not meant to leave in us the impression of a disturbing dissonance.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DATES AND SOURCES OF THE FIVE GREAT TRAGEDIES.

I HAVE been loth to disturb the charming climax to which these five tragedies ascend in succession, and which draw the essential principles and different stages of life into the tragic view of the world, by dry historical, philological and critical disquisitions. I propose, therefore, now to give the few necessary remarks concerning their respective dates and origin. 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Othello,' as has hitherto generally been assumed, are respectively the earliest and latest. Of '*Romeo and Juliet*' there exist two very old editions; the first is dated 1597, the second 1599; the former was, probably, originally a stenographic transcript made during the performance of the play, the latter is augmented in every scene, and not only corrects the errors and omissions of the first, but is probably also founded upon a subsequent revision of the whole poem by the poet himself. And, while, according to the first edition, the piece, as regards language and versification, colouring and character, possesses something of the youthful awkwardness and want of power in portraying the whole wealth of the inner life in a corresponding breadth of expression and action, and consequently is much briefer and more condensed (as in the case of 'Titus Andronicus' and 'Henry VI.' 2nd and 3rd parts), the second edition appears already to possess quite the same amplexness, polish and completeness as the folio of 1623, which with but few alterations, is reprinted in the later quarto of 1609. If we take the first of these editions, Tyrwhitt's supposition that the Nurse's words: 'tis since the earthquake now eleven years,' may have originally applied to the earthquake felt in England in 1580, is not at all so entirely unfounded as Malone at first thought. For if he, with the concurrence of Drake, is

disposed to find an error of reckoning in the Nurse's words, he forgets that children are not necessarily weaned after their first year, that on the contrary in earlier times it was the custom for a mother to suckle her child for two years and longer, and this may the more readily be assumed in the present case, as the Nurse expressly says that Juliet could not only stand, but even run about and speak. In fact there is nothing to prevent the play (in the form it stands in the edition of 1597) being—in accordance with its first appearance—assigned to about the year 1592, therefore pretty soon after 'Henry VI.,' 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and 'Love's Labour Lost.' This is corroborated not only by the many passages in rhyme—the whole scene between Friar Laurence and Romeo moves in rhymes—but especially by the frequent occurrence of alternate rhymes—which are rarely met with in Shakspeare's later dramas. The versification is as carefully correct as in the poet's youthful plays. The language, also, still exhibits a prevailing lyrical character and frequently reminds one of 'Venus and Adonis,' it is rich in those so-called conceits which Lilly had introduced from Italian novels; and in spite of the later revision, there still remain many lines where the expression of the pathetic loses itself in the obscurity of bombast, and the imagery reminds one of the often forced similes and far-fetched points in Shakspeare's youthful works. These considerations, in my opinion, make it seem probable that 'Romeo and Juliet' may have been composed before 'Richard II.' and 'King John,' and therefore not so late as 1592, as is supposed, by Collier and Dyce, who follow Malone.

'*Othello*,' in the form we now have it, was formerly pretty generally accounted among the poet's last works, most critics assigned it to the year 1612. But there is no doubt that the manuscript which Collier* is said to have discovered and, according to which '*Othello*' was performed by Burbage's company as early as August 1602, for the entertainment of the Queen at Lord Ellesmere's residence, is a forgery.† However, according to a re-

* *New Particulars*, p. 59.

† Ingleby, *l.c.*, 261 f.—According to an article in the *The Athenæum*, June, 1868, p. 863, *The Extracts from the Accounts of the*

cently discovered document (a list of the plays performed at Court in 1604), a drama entitled 'The Moor of Venice' was acted in the Banqueting House at Whitehall, on the 1st of November, 1604.* The poet's name is not mentioned, it is true, but there is no reason for doubting that it was Shakspeare's 'Othello.' Possibly therefore, the piece was brought upon the stage in 1604, but was probably remodelled at a later day by Shakspeare himself and put into the form we now have it. For it did not appear in print till 1622, and according to the partially extant accounts of Lord Harrington, the King's treasurer, it was acted at Court in May, 1613, at the celebration of the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth with the Elector Palatine.† That Shakspeare remodelled it for this occasion is of itself very likely, and becomes almost a matter of certainty by the fact that in the third act, there is a distinct allusion to King James's second patent of the 28th of May, 1612, concerning the creating of baronets.‡

The substance of both these tragedies, moreover, is founded upon Italian novels;§ 'Romeo and Juliet,' upon Bandello's *Sfortunata morte di due infelicissimi Amanti*,|| 'Othello' upon Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*.¶ For although there existed a drama of the same subject and title as 'Romeo and Juliet' even before 1562, still it is not likely that Shakspeare was acquainted with the piece which had never been printed, and had certainly long since disappeared from the stage; and that later dramas had treated the same subject—which certainly seems to have been very popular—is a mere conjecture. The first novel Shakspeare may have known either from the version in

Revels, etc., in so far as they refer to the theatrical performances at Court (hence those concerning the representations of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*), are suspected of being forgeries. Compare the further discussion on this point in vol. ii.

* Dyce's *Shaks*, i. p. 92.

† Dyce, *l.c.*, 94.

‡ Chalmers's *Suppl. Apol.*, p. 160. Drake, ii. 527 f.

§ Compare Echtermeyer, Henschel, and Simrock: *Quellen des Shaks.*, etc. Berlin, 1831.

|| II. 9, Ed. of 1554.

¶ Dec. iii. Nov. 7.

Paynter's 'Palace of Pleasure,' or from Arthur Brooke's 'Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet,' a narrative poem not without merit, which appeared in print as early as 1562.* A careful comparison shows that Shakspeare, even though he knew Paynter's translation, has chiefly followed the more poetical description of Brooke. Of Cinthio's novel†, however, we do not know of any English translation from Shakspeare's time, and his being said to have known it from the French of Gabriel Chapuys, is founded on the mere supposition that he was unacquainted with the Italian language. Both dramas agree in all essential points with the sources from which they were taken; every single deviation, however, is a poetical excellence of which the reader may easily convince himself. In 'Othello,' for instance, the affecting conclusion of the whole is entirely Shakspeare's work; the novel, as it were, runs on and loses itself in the sand. In like manner the excellent, life-like characters of Mercutio, Count Paris and the Nurse in the first play, and of Roderigo, Cassio and Emilia in the second, are Shakspeare's own invention; in Bandello and Cinthio we have only the mere names. That the spirit he has contrived to breathe into the borrowed subject-matter is thoroughly his own, and that he first raised the principal figures into truly poetical characters, is self-evident.

Shakspeare's life-giving and animating power manifests itself with even still more force in 'Hamlet.' The 'Legend of Amleth'‡ furnishes scarcely more than a bare skeleton, which, it is true, appears somewhat more supple in Belleforest's tragical stories and their English translation§, but compared with Shakspeare's 'Hamlet,' it remains a colourless and life-less skeleton. Whether Shakspeare drew from this novel or from the old play of the same name, which was known before 1587, cannot be

* Collier has had both reprinted in his *Shakespeare's Library, a Collection of Romances, Novels, etc.* (vol. ii.).

† Collier, *l.c.*, printed in the original.

‡ The oldest known sources of which are the Danish histories of Saxo Grammaticus.

§ In the old novel, *The Hystorie of Hamblett*, in Collier, *l.c.*, i. 131 ff.

ascertained as the 'old play is lost.* Probably, however, the latter was the immediate source of our 'Hamlet,' inasmuch as Shakspeare's attention was presumably drawn towards it, by its being 'warmed up again' (after 1594). That he did not begin to work upon the subject till after 1597 may, with safety, be assumed from the fact that Meres does not mention 'Hamlet.' It is not entered at Stationers' Hall till the year 1602. The oldest edition, which has only recently become known, bears the date of 1603, and therefore is presumably only a pirated edition.† In the second quarto of 1604, which had hitherto been regarded as the earliest, it appears half as long again (as the title itself intimates), and this new version was made the foundation of the folio of 1613; it

* Th. Nash mentions it in his *Epistle to the Gentlemen Students of the two Universities* which was printed as a kind of prologue to Greene's *Arcadia* (Menaphon), and in which the author of the piece is ridiculed as the English Seneca, being, in reality, an ignorant lawyer. It is a matter of little importance whether this epistle—as Farmer and Knight think—did not appear till 1589 or, as Dyce maintains, as early as 1587. In no case can the old play, of which it speaks, have been written by Shakspeare as the first and subsequently revised sketch of his *Hamlet*—which opinion is assumed by Knight, Elze and others. This is contradicted in the first place by the remark which Nash makes of the person of the author. Moreover, in this case, the *Hamlet* which, according to Henslowe's 'Diary,' was performed in 1594, and is mentioned by Th. Lodge in his *Wit's Miserie* (1596), would also have to be Shakspeare's. This, however, is again contradicted—as already remarked—by Lodge's own words, when speaking of one of the devils whom he mentions: 'he looks as pale as ye wizard of ye ghost which cried so miserably at ye theatre, like an oister-wife, Hamlet revenge.' For in Shakspeare there is no such exclamation in the speech of the Ghost. The word *revenge* is met with but twice in all of what the Ghost says (in the earlier edition of 1603 but once), and moreover not as an exclamation of warning, but at the commencement of his narrative, therefore not shrieked out, but spoken quietly in the flow of the speech. Lastly, it would indeed be very strange that if Shakspeare's *Hamlet* had existed before 1598, Meres—in his frequently quoted work—should not have enumerated it among the twelve pieces of Shakspeare which he mentions, when he does not even omit *Titus Andronicus*, which is obviously a youthful production.

† And yet there can be no doubt that this edition gives the play in an earlier and more imperfect form, although miserably distorted, as Delius (*Shaks. Werke*, i., p. iii.) points out; hence that Shakspeare remodelled it. This is perfectly evident upon a closer examination of the piece, as Ch. Knight (*l.c.*, p. 63 ff.) has proved.

has only occasional abridgments, and in compensation some additions which do not exist in the other, but are met with in the print of 1603, though in a distorted form.* Curiously enough, in the edition of 1603, the missing passages are especially those in which we have Hamlet's meditations and reflections on the problems of human life. Their being added may have specially contributed to the very considerable enlargement of the new version. Perhaps it was the study of Montaigne's 'Essays' (the English translation of which appeared in 1603) that induced the poet to revise the play and to give greater prominence to the distinguishing features in Hamlet's character. Shakspeare, as we know, possessed a copy of this translation, and Montaigne's sceptical observations—which everywhere betray the same unsatisfied ponderings—may have placed Shakspeare's mind in a similar state, or, at all events, have offered him rich material for the continuation of his work; they would also recommend themselves to his interest from a dramatical point of view, because they gave greater depth to the character of the hero, stronger motives for his conduct and, at the same time, made him a sharper contrast to his surroundings. I am, therefore, inclined to assume that the piece may have made its first appearance between 1598 and 1600, and that its present form belongs to the year 1603.†

* In my opinion the remark on the title-page of the edition of 1604: '*Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect coppie,*' proves that the piece had only shortly before been expanded to about double its length. For the word '*newly*' evidently does not refer only to '*imprinted*,' but also to '*enlarged*,' and the words '*as it was*,' cannot possibly be considered as referring to the pirated edition of 1603, and as signifying that the piece is enlarged to about almost double the length in which it appeared in that edition.

† This supposition is supported by the references to the family relations and circumstances in the life of James I., which are undoubtedly met with in *Hamlet*, according to the interpretations of K. Silberschlag (Prutz's *Museum*, 1859, i. 504 ff., 808 f., 1860, i. 132 ff.) and Joh. Müller (*Die politischen Anspielungen in Shak's Hamlet*, Berlin, 1864. Compare also *Court and Society, from Elizabeth to Anne*. Edited by the Duke of Manchester, Lond., 1863). Still I feel convinced that they cannot either have greatly influenced the poet's motives or affected the development of his work, and cannot, therefore, be of any assistance to the interpretation of the drama.

Of '*King Lear*,' there exist, in addition to the folio edition, two earlier quartos, issued by the same publisher, and in the same year. The one is far more correctly printed than the other, and contains important deviations.* It was, no doubt, the great demand for the work that induced the publisher to make arrangements for a second and better impression. The piece is entered at Stationers' Hall under the date of November 26th, 1607, with the remark (repeated on the title-page of both editions) 'As yt was plaid before the King's Majesty at White-Hall, uppon S. Stephen's Night; in Christmas Hollidaies.' Accordingly, it was in existence at the end of 1606. That it did not appear till *after* Elizabeth's death, and probably after the proclamation of James I. in October 1604 (on the occasion of his accession to the throne), may be inferred from an allusion to the union of Scotland and England under the name of *Britain*;† but, moreover, there are several names of devils and demons mentioned by Edgar, which can be proved to have been borrowed from Harsnet's 'Discovery of Popish Imposters,' which was published in 1603.‡ The tragedy, therefore, did not, at all events, appear till after 1603, probably not till after the publication of the above-mentioned proclamation of James. As, however, the entry in the Register of Stationers' Hall, and the two old quartos expressly mention its performance before the king, without, as customary, referring to the frequent repetition of the piece (as a sign of its popularity), this representation at Court is probably meant to indicate the first appearance which met with specially great applause. In addition to this, is the fact that the much older play, 'The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three Daughters,' etc.,§ is entered in the books of the Stationers' Company under the date of May 8th, 1605, with the remark as 'lately acted,' in other words, that it had been recently revived after a long interval. This performance and the approval which the play may

* Cambridge Edition of Sh.'s Works, T. viii., p. xii. f.

† Chalmer's *Suppl. Apol.* p. 417 f.

‡ Collier's *Shakespeare*, vii. 353.

§ *Six Old Plays, upon which Shakespeare is founded*, etc., vol. i., 389 ff.

have excited, in spite of its great defects (as we may presume from its first appearance in print), may have drawn Shakspeare's attention to the dramatic value of the material, and have induced him to compose his 'King Lear.' Now, as these external indications coincide with the internal testimonies—character, composition, versification and language—the piece was probably finished at the beginning or about the middle of the year 1606. The legend of 'King Leir,' who is said to have ruled over England in the year of the world 3105, is found narrated in the Chronicles of Holinshed and his predecessor Geoffroy of Monmouth. It is only recently that a still earlier source has been found in a Welsh manuscript under the title of 'Chronikle of the Kings'; it, however, corresponds in all essential points with Holinshed's account. The earlier piece is pretty much the same as the later one, whereas our tragedy deviates from it considerably, so that in this case, as in 'Hamlet,' the subject—owing to the entirely different character it has received—appears at first sight wholly altered. Moreover, it is made half as long again by the introduction of the story of Gloster and his sons, of which the legend and the old 'King Leir' knows nothing, and the subject of which (but again only the first, rude outlines) Shakspeare probably borrowed from an episode in Sidney's 'Arcadia.'* It is astonishing, and absolutely like new creation, when we consider what Shakspeare has here elaborated out of such dry materials; but still more astonishing is the skill with which he has harmoniously interwoven the two subjects, and contrived to imbue both the old legend and the modern tale with the same deeply poetical significance and spirit. The characters of Kent and the Fool, as in fact those of all the personages, are his own invention.

In the case of 'Macbeth,' on the other hand, the legend—which is here based upon a semi-historical foundation—had worked out the subject for him more perfectly. The history of Macbeth (which belongs to about the middle of the eleventh century), as narrated in Holinshed's Chronicle,† contains all the essential tragic motives which Shakspeare unfolds in his tragedy. Also in regard to the course of

* In Collier: *Shakspeare's Library*, vol. ii. † See Collier, *l.c.*

the incidents, he has made only slight alterations, having done almost no more than condense what is undramatically diffuse in the narrative. All the characters, also, are given by Holinshed, at least in outline; even the witches and their prophecies are not wanting. And yet we need only place Holinshed's Chronicle and Shakspeare's drama side by side, to see what a mighty genius it required to produce such a work out of the given materials. the less the external facts, the position of affairs, the circumstances and relations of the acting personages are altered, the more astonishing is the skill and the poetical power with which the subject-matter has received depth, poetical animation and harmonious arrangement. The character of the hero also, although altered but in a few features, appears, nevertheless, by this very means changed into a truly tragic character.* That the play was not composed till James's reign, is proved even by the introduction of the kings of Banquo's race, among whom James himself figures as the bearer of a triple crown. Moreover, by making Banquo appear ignorant of the murder of Duncan, Shakspeare unquestionably deviated from the historical tradition, simply out of regard for his patron; but even this small matter of politeness is, at the same time, a poetical excellence, for, if Banquo were made an accomplice, the weight of the tragic pathos would partly be transferred from Macbeth to him, and thereby become weakened. James's descent from Banquo is expressly mentioned in the appendices to Warner's 'Albion's England,' which first appeared in print in 1606, and may, probably, not have been a generally known fact before that date. Malone,† therefore, with the concurrence of Chalmers, Drake, and the best English critics, assigns the drama to about the year 1606. That it was not written earlier, seems to me as almost certain, to judge from its character, language and composition. I would rather agree to its having been written some years later, and this supposition is confirmed by the remark in a manuscript diary belonging to a Dr. Simon Forman—recently discovered by Collier—which reports the perform-

* Compare Hiccke · *Shakspeare's Macbeth*, p. 98

† *Chronolog. order*, etc., in Reed's *Shakspeare*, ii., 337 f.

ance of 'Macbeth,' on the 20th of April, 1610, and intimates that the piece had only just appeared, at least, that he had hitherto been unaware of its existence.* Accordingly it is probable that the play opened a cycle of summer representations for that year, and a new play was likely to be chosen for such an occasion. This supposition has met with objections, inasmuch as the allusion to the union of the three kingdoms under James's sceptre, made it seem probable that the play appeared soon after James's accession to the throne; but I do not see why this courtesy should lose its meaning by the play being performed before the king in 1610, in place of 1609. The tragedy was first printed in the folio edition in 1623—a circumstance which also supports the supposition of its later origin.

* Collier, *New Particulars*, etc., p. 23.

CHAPTER VII.

TITUS ANDRONICUS. TIMON OF ATHENS.

I CLASS these two tragedies together for several reasons, but especially on account of a certain internal affinity between them, and because, in regard to date they most probably form the opening and the close of Shakspeare's activity in the domain of Tragedy. These two plays when compared with each other, throw a peculiar light upon the nature of Shakspeare's tragic poetry, as well as upon the tragedies which were written in the interval between them.

1. TITUS ANDRONICUS.

This was a favourite piece with the people; according to a remark of Ben Jonson in his 'Bartholomew Fair' (1604), it had been on the boards for from twenty-five to thirty years, and, therefore, must have been written in 1587-88. Meres—who was not only acquainted with the dramatic art and literature of his day, but seems also to have been a personal friend of Shakspeare's—cites the play among the twelve pieces which he mentions with approbation in his work of 1598, already frequently quoted. The piece also exists in the first folio edition which was arranged by Heming and Condell, likewise friends of Shakspeare, and joint shareholders with him of the Globe Theatre. In face of historical testimonies of such weight, no critical arguments can be of any value, much less then the often petty remarks of the early English critics, who were prejudiced by a false feeling of taste, and doubted the genuineness of the piece because they considered it unworthy of Shakspeare; further, because many passages (according to Marlowe's calculation twenty) contained allusions and images from ancient mythology and history, nay, even Latin verses; again because there was not a single humorous scene, and because the lines run on in

unchanging irregularity without Shakspeare's usual dissyllabic terminations; and lastly, because the piece was entered at Stationers' Hall, without the poet's name, on Feb. 6th, 1594, and had also been printed anonymously in two earlier editions, during the poet's lifetime (in 1594 and 1611).^{*} The last reason, which in our day would be the strongest, when applied to Shakspeare's time is the weakest. For when a piece first appeared on the stage, the poet's name—in accordance with the custom of the time and the general estimation of such productions—would unquestionably not have been mentioned, and may, therefore, in 1594, have been unknown to the publisher, who, certainly edited it without the author's knowledge or consent; or else, the addition of the name may have appeared quite superfluous as the piece had long had its admirers, and did not require the authority of a name to recommend it. For, are not the three above-mentioned editions of 'Romeo and Juliet' as well as several other quartos (for instance, the three old editions of 'Henry V.,' those of 'Richard II.,' of 1597, and of 'Henry IV.' of 1598) published without Shakspeare's name? The edition of 1611 is, moreover, most probably merely a reprint of the earlier one of 1594 which is lost. But as to the supposed un-Shakspearian peculiarities in regard to language, versification, etc., they are partly not at all so un-Shakspearian as they are thought to be—for in those pieces which are well known to be his earliest, *i.e.*, his youthful productions, we meet with the same regularity of versification, the same monotony of cadence and rhythm as in 'Titus Andronicus,'—and partly, become perfectly intelligible as soon as we consider that when young Shakspeare first came to London, he knew nothing more of dramatic art and poetry than what he may have become acquainted with through representations given by the companies of players who visited Stratford; accordingly, that in his first poetical attempts, he could scarcely have done otherwise than follow the footsteps of the earlier celebrated masters—in the present case, especially Kyd and Marlowe—in whom we find an abundance of such peculiarities. It would, on the contrary, have been as much surprising had

^{*} Reed's *Shakspeare*, xxi., 138, 140 f.

he not done this, and had his first attempts at once been perfect masterpieces. This 'Titus Andronicus' is certainly not. On the contrary it is not difficult to discover the great defects of the piece. The deeds and fortunes represented are so hideous, so revolting that they can only excite horror and disgust, nay, in this respect the play even surpasses Marlowe's well-known pieces of violence and rage, in the same proportion as it stands above them in tragic power and moral earnestness. Atrocity is succeeded by atrocity, which follow upon one another in an astounding gradation; when we fancy we have reached the highest pitch of unnatural cruelty and wickedness, we are suddenly, in the next scene, shown a still higher degree. The characters are sketched in rough outlines and harsh colours, nay, the Moor Aaron is *perhaps*—I fear *only* perhaps—untrue to nature, being a devil rather than a man. It is true that the nature of human wickedness is most difficult to understand and most easy to depict. The development of the action is hurried on, if not actually without consideration, still with precipitate haste and without adequate motives. The composition, lastly, is not well rounded off, although the great variety of actions and incidents is not inartistically arranged and can readily be surveyed.

These are, indeed, important defects. But if we bear in mind the wild tragedies of Marlowe (which were so highly praised in his own day) and the other favourite pieces of the English public, such as 'The Spanish Tragedy,' 'Soliman and Perseda,' etc., it will seem very natural that Shakspeare, in the overflowing energy of youth, should have fallen into the same aberrations. For his *school* of art was chiefly nothing but his own experience in art. He had to pass through the existing state of dramatic poetry which he was subsequently to leave so far behind; and his having in Tragedy followed the footsteps of Kyd and Marlowe, rather than those of Greene and Peele, happened no doubt from the same reason which led Goethe and Schiller to prefer Shakspeare to Racine and Voltaire, and Pindar to prefer Stesichoros to Simonides. That, however, he has far surpassed his models in their own style, and accordingly that 'Titus Andronicus' cannot

have been written by any second, greater, but unknown Kyd or Marlowe is a point which scarcely any one acquainted with the earlier English tragedies will dispute, if he considers the merits of the piece as well as its defects. It cannot be said that Shakspeare has here confounded the tragic with the horrible; he has rather given the tragic but the lower one-sided and hence inappropriate form of the horrible. The horrible is doubtless not tragic in itself, but it *may* nevertheless be tragic just because it consists only in the external *form* of human actions and sufferings. To kill a man with the thrust of a dagger is not horrible, although it is so when he is tortured to death on the rack. 'Titus Andronicus' will always remain tragic in so far as here also what is humanly great and noble falls of its own frailty, or its inherent one-sidedness. For that the hero is not undeservedly overpowered by his tragic fate, is evident if, on the one hand, we consider the cold-blooded indifference with which he causes Tamora's eldest son to be conducted as a victim to the sacrifice—an act of cruelty in which his own sons take part;—on the other hand, the passionate heat in which he strikes down his own child for a pardonable opposition to his will, and finally the fearful inhuman revenge he takes upon the doubtless equally inhuman Queen. Moreover, poetical justice is also satisfied by the common ruin which in the end overtakes all those that are guilty. Lastly, it must not be overlooked that the foundation of the whole is based upon those later days of the Roman empire, which, as is well known, were so full in horrible deeds of every description, and that the history of the time almost outstrips the boldest imagination. The character of the age forms so decidedly the background of the whole picture, that the piece thereby somewhat resembles the historical dramas, and, accordingly, ought to be viewed and examined by no other than the spirit of the age. When this is done it will be found that the tragic element, in this case, could not have been represented otherwise; and it may be asked, if horror does really exist in history, why should not the tragic element sometimes also assume this form? Tragedy, in its full force and the whole depth of its significance, is, in fact, not created for tender minds with weak nerves.

It requires strong shoulders to bear the accumulated weight of the tragic pathos contained in the life of man.

This, therefore, is not the principal defect of the piece. How much of what is horrible is met with in the universally admired Greek tragedies, the myths of Atreus and Thyestes, Orestes and Clytemnestra, Œdipus and his family, the sources of the Greek tragedy! Is not Gloster's fate in 'King Lear' horrible? are we not also at times seized with horror in 'Macbeth' and 'Othello'? In single cases, therefore, it is perfectly allowable; the fault lies only in the fact that that which, in accordance with its nature, is but an isolated, special, and exceptional reality, appears here as the *general, sole*, form of the tragic element. The drama itself, its substance and ideal character is a mere representation of the tragic, degenerating into the horrible, which indeed necessarily takes place when, in the universal decay of the state and people, even a good and noble character (like Titus) breaks through the most indispensable, the most sacred ties of nature, owing to a want of clearness of moral consciousness, of power, and self-control, and tramples upon all parental feelings. It is this deed, which is spun out into the fearful tissue of the following scenes of horror, that first awakens the fiend in Tamora's nature, and the brute in Aaron. When evil is challenged by the good itself, it not only annihilates itself, but the good as well, which, of course, is then no longer truly good. It is from this point of view that the whole drama is composed; it forms the organic centre in which all the separate rays converge. But the horrible, when so accumulated, and made such an ordinary, natural element of life, requires a deeper and more accurate foundation. It is not sufficient simply to presuppose a general state of decay, because the horrible is not necessarily the *general* form of the tragic, even in such a state of things. However even this fault is one that could be tolerated, at least, it is not wholly wanting in motive. The principal and actual defect is, in reality, the total absence of the *conciliatory* element in the tragic pathos. Titus Andronicus dies without having even once come to the consciousness and conviction of his guilt, to the duty of submitting to the will of the gods, in short, without that

which is good and beautiful in him having been purified and sublimated by the tragic pathos. It is the same with his younger sons; nay, even Lavinia, whose character is intended to be one of noble womanliness, can, with cold indifference, hold the basin which is to catch the blood of the two victims, and is herself killed by the dagger of her own father while assisting at the horrible repast. Aaron, Tamora, and Saturnine die as they have lived, and Lucius marks his elevation to the dignity of governor with the command for the inhuman and revolting execution of the Moor. Thus the drama ends in a shrill discord which is but little relieved by the abrupt and cold declaration of the new ruler:

"Then afterwards to order well the state
That like events may ne'er it ruinate—"

although it somewhat reminds one of Shakspeare's later manner of concluding his tragedies. We do not feel sure that things will not continue to proceed, behind the scenes, in the way they have begun; we turn with horror from such a view of human nature, nay, we are almost forced in despair, to ask, Why was such a race ever called into existence?

That, moreover, even this drama is rich in profound thoughts and wonderful imagery, peculiarly Shakspearian (which burst through the whole like flashes of lightning), nay, that it is full of deeply pathetic and highly poetical scenes, cannot be denied even by those who doubt its having been written by Shakspeare.* I shall only call attention to the scene of the shooting with bows and arrows, and the interview between Titus and Tamora, who announces herself as the goddess of vengeance, to the old man who is regarded as insane. Even the latter's curious state of mind, this *chiaroscuro* between madness and intentional self-command, between playful thoughtlessness and energetic presence of mind, is described with wonderful truth and accuracy. Even without historical evidence, therefore, such single passages would be sufficient to prove that the work could only be the youthful attempt of one of the most gifted poets.

* See Gervinus, *Shakspeare Commentaries*, translated by F. E. Bunnè (1875), p. 102 ff.

It cannot with safety be determined whence the subject of the piece was taken. A ballad on the same theme and with the same title is entered at Stationers' Hall in 1594 under the same date as the play. But it is probable that—as frequently happened—the ballad was composed from the favourite drama; still it is also probable that the reverse was the case. But, as according to Paynter's 'Palace of Pleasure' the story of Titus Andronicus was very well known at the time, the subject-matter is by no means Shakspeare's own invention; on the contrary, he has here again kept pretty closely to his sources.

2. TIMON OF ATHENS.

'Timon of Athens' is one of Shakspeare's most remarkable pieces, and in many respects is a problem that has given editors, interpreters, and critics much to puzzle their brains with, which has nevertheless not, by any means, as yet been satisfactorily solved. In the first place the representation suffers from a striking want of equality; some portions have evidently been worked out with pleasure and care, others, on the contrary, have been so carelessly thrown off, and connected in so loose and disjointed a manner, that they are not only wanting in strict coherence, but even contradictions have crept in. It is much the same as regards the delineation of the characters; several of the personages, especially Timon himself, are described minutely and thoroughly in Shakspeare's usual masterly style, others are mere sketches drawn with a few touches, and others again, mere representatives of whole classes of men. Lastly, similar contradictions pervade the diction: by the side of lines which, in structure, rhythm, and linguistic character entirely resemble the treatment of the blank verse of Shakspeare's later pieces, we find a loose and careless prose, unconnected, bounding transitions from the one form of language to the other, passages of which it cannot be determined whether they are intended to be verse or prose; we also find rhyming couplets in places where Shakspeare does not generally employ them. Coleridge was therefore of opinion that the tragedy—originally one of Shakspeare's most perfect works—had

subsequently been corrupted in various ways by alterations, additions, and omissions on the part of the actors, whereas earlier English critics ascribe the evident corruption of the text only to careless copyists, printers, and correctors. Charles Knight, however, endeavours to prove that 'Timon of Athens' is the earlier work of an unknown author which Shakspeare has only partially remodelled.* N. Delius at first considered the play to be a youthful production of Shakspeare's own which he subsequently improved only in several passages, and in others remodelled entirely, but he now shares Knight's opinion, and has, accordingly, attempted to distinguish the parts written by Shakspeare from the rest.† Gervinus, lastly, wishes to ascribe this looseness of style, to a series of Shakspeare's later plays (such as 'Timon of Athens,' 'Antony and Cleopatra,' etc.), and regards it only as a general, but to us unknown state of the poet's mind.—In this alone all critics agree, that the piece, so far as it was written by Shakspeare, is one of the works of the last period of his poetical career.

I, on my part, consider it as extremely improbable that Shakspeare, in the last period of his poetical activity, should have remodelled the work of another poet, and that his friends Heminge and Condell should have admitted this—in all essential points—foreign work into their collection of his works. It is also surprising that there nowhere exists a trace of this strange and certainly not unimportant poet or his works, although he doubtless was a contemporary of Shakspeare's, and—as his supposed hand in 'Timon' proves—a not inexperienced dramatic poet. For all critics are now agreed that the portions of the play which, in the opinion of Knight and Delius, have been left unaltered by Shakspeare, betray the hand of an accomplished dramatic poet, rather than the distinguishing features of a youthful production, that, accordingly, 'Timon of Athens' cannot even have been a youthful work of Shakspeare's own. Moreover, I cannot find that the difference between the supposed foreign portions and those written by Shakspeare is as great and wide, as they appear to the (perhaps more sharp-sighted) eyes of Knight and

* *Studies of Shakspeare*, p. 68 ff.

† *Jahrbuch d. Deutschen Shakspeare-Gesellschaft*, ii. 335 ff.

Delius. Both of them, at least, grant that even those portions contain passages which are quite Shakspearian in character. I think that the unquestionable inequality of the drama, apart from the equally unquestionable corruption of the text, seems to lie in the decidedly greater hurry and carelessness with which some portions have been worked out, compared with others. In explanation of this inequality, I must remind the reader of the well known remark of Heminge and Condell—in their Preface to the first edition of Shakspeare's works (1623)—that the manuscript of his dramas contained hardly a correction, 'scarce a blot.' Shakspeare, therefore, was so in the habit of being peculiarly quick and correct in writing down his dramas, and of doing so with such ease and readiness, that this manner of working had excited the admiration of his friends, whereas Ben Jonson—as is well known—considered this the cause of the several mistakes which, in his opinion, Shakspeare had committed. On the other hand, we know that Shakspeare revised and remodelled several of his plays (for instance, 'Hamlet,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' etc.) after he had given them up to the theatre, and they had been for some time on the stage. This probably occurred much more frequently than we are justified in assuming from the poor state of our knowledge on the subject; for in those days it was the general custom of the theatre to bring older plays again on to the stage, after having, by additions and improvements, furnished them with some new power of attraction. I conjecture, therefore, that Shakspeare originally made a rapid and hurried sketch of 'Timon of Athens,' only that this was done with greater hurry and carelessness than usual (perhaps because towards the end of his poetical career he became more and more dissatisfied with the theatre and his profession), but that subsequently—after the piece had been brought upon the stage—he found himself nevertheless obliged to work out some parts with more care; perhaps, because of the small success the piece had met with.

This, however, would only explain the *internal* inequality in the treatment of the various parts of the drama. The *external* inequality, the greater corruption of the text visible in several parts, and, indeed, just those in which

Shakspeare seems to have made little or no alterations, is doubtless owing partly to the carelessness of the compositor and corrector of the press, partly, however, as I think, owing to another reason which may be inferred from the manner in which the piece appears printed in the folio of 1623—the form in which it was first published. It is here placed between 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Julius Cæsar,' and fills apparently but nineteen, in reality twenty-one leaves (from p. 80 to p. 98), inasmuch as four and not two leaves are marked with numbers 81–82. The first leaf after p. 98 is filled only with the names of the actors who took part in the representation, the following leaf, however, is a blank. The print of 'Julius Cæsar' commences directly after this, but the first leaf is not, as it should be, marked p. 100, but p. 109. Obviously, therefore, the print of 'Julius Cæsar' was commenced before 'Timon of Athens' was finished, probably because the manuscript of 'Timon' was incomplete, and the missing portions could not be procured quickly enough. Shakspeare's original manuscript was consequently no longer in existence, and the piece had to be made up from the scrolls of the actors. This, in the first place, explains the insertion of the double leaves with pages 81 and 82, and likewise the second curious coincidence that, although the print begins with the heading *Actus primus, Scaenus prima*, there is no further mention, in the play, of a division into acts and scenes. If we further assume (what is more than likely) that certain parts were very carelessly written, and that the actors had taken it upon themselves to introduce more or less important alterations into the text, by additions, omissions, etc., perhaps also that the whole had been abridged by the manager, this will explain not only the great corruption of the text in single passages, as regards language and versification, but also the looseness of the connection, the occasional contradictions and the unmotivated manner in which the hero of the drama—upon whom everything turns—disappears from the stage, leaving one in ignorance as to whether, and why he dies just at that moment. (Perhaps the actual closing scene in the stage manuscripts was entirely wanting or was intentionally cut short.)

It is self-evident that the co-operation of all these circumstances could result only in a work defective in many respects, and that it does not require any peculiarly sharp insight to discover a whole series of faults in the form in which the play has come down to us. I, nevertheless, think—apart from single instances—that to judge from its substance, spirit, and character, it is by no means a work unworthy of Shakspeare. But, in order to penetrate into the substance of the whole, it is first of all necessary to understand the character of Timon, and it is just his character that has repeatedly been misunderstood. Timon has not won the love of his fellow-men, only by his profuse liberality, his entertainments and drinking-bouts, which would justify the question, What hast thou done to entitle thee to demand general love and consideration? He has also shed his blood for his country; he is not only a brave warrior, but such an experienced general and statesman that the Senate and people of Athens turn to him as a last resource in their time of need. He could include among his friends not only parasites and a low set of people, but also the greatest and most influential men of Athens. Born and brought up in the lap of luxury, in a well-regulated home, and unquestionably beneath the eyes of noble parents, faithful teachers and servants, happy and great by wealth as well as by an abundance of noble qualities of mind, and, accordingly, beloved and flattered by all around him, he had accustomed himself to consider all men to be as noble and virtuous as, in fact, he himself is. In spite of their weaknesses and faults, of which he is of course aware, he regards them all as brothers, as members of one large family, who have but one common inheritance from the friendly gods, each a portion for his own management. This is why he regards his own property as existing merely for the common benefit of all; this is why he likes to accept what he can give back doubly and trebly; this is why his external good fortune is to him nothing, the love of his fellow creatures everything. His not understanding human nature does not so much arise from any fault of his own, as because it has hitherto never shown itself to him otherwise than in the one bright light of a selfishly-displayed friendship and consideration for himself. The

power of thought—so, in the present case, the ideal basis of the tragedy is formed by the more *general* relation of the special to the whole, *i.e.*, of man to humanity. And as, in the first cases, the love of the betrothed, the love of husband and wife, the love of parents and children becomes tragic under certain circumstances, so in the present case the general love of humanity immediately turns into tragic pathos when—in its one-sidedness, which amounts to the adoration of men, it confounds man with humanity—it gives itself up wholly without discrimination, and thus forgets and injures the right of the love of friends, of parents and of country. Accordingly, when comprehended in its inmost nature, this tragedy appears to stand in a significant and ideal relation to ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and ‘King Lear’; it forms, so to say, the second and completing half of the latter. In the former cases we have love in its peculiar relation to those special, organically arranged circles into which the whole of mankind is divided; in the present case, we have love in its most general relation to this whole itself. The sphere of *sentiment*—the centre and predominant power of which is love—is thereby exhausted, and all its principal domains brought within the tragic view of life. An organic contrast to this is found in *Hamlet*, as the representative of the sphere of *mind* and *thought*, whereas *Macbeth* holds the mean between these contrasts, inasmuch as he represents the sphere of *will* and of *action* into which—at least as regards the drama—the other two spheres must of necessity flow.

In spite of the censured defects of the play, it is, in my opinion, wonderful with what skill Shakspeare has contrived to form so unmanageable a subject, as is offered by the story of *Timon*, into a living and drastic action. This he has accomplished partly by the relations he has established between the life and fortunes of the individual persons and the whole nation and state; particularly, however, by the triple contrast in which he has placed the character of *Timon* as regards the other chief persons of the piece. In the first place in its contrast to the worthless flatterers and parasites who affect the same friendship, devotion and philanthropy towards *Timon*, merely in order to prey

upon him. These personages are certainly but little individualised, they are in reality as like as peas, and yet the poet has with striking irony contrived to give each his peculiar shade of colour, as is especially indicated in the different ways in which they accept and reject Timon's entreaties for assistance. Opposed to this friendship of semblance and falsehood, stands the true and warm affection of Timon's household, especially that of his steward Flavius, whom Timon declares the only honest man. In an over-civilized, morally corrupt state, where the senators are usurers, where the people abandon themselves to luxury and gluttony, and banish the more virtuous from their midst or leave them to perish from neglect, and where the army, accompanied by courtesans, takes up arms against its own country, the little of virtue and morality that is left takes refuge in the lowest orders.

A very contrast to Timon, in his self-made misanthropy and in his sincere hatred of mankind, is found in the cynic Apemantus. To the latter we might justly put the question: What hast thou done *for* mankind, that thou presumest so profoundly to hate and despise them? He is himself but half a man; his life has always been but half that of a man; accordingly, his treatment of himself and of men is only half human, *i.e.*, half currish. Because fortune has denied him her best gifts, and because he cannot attain consideration and authority in any other way, he has had recourse to his mind, his coarse wit, and his more than ordinary strength of will, so as to assert himself by a cynical mode of life, and by the unblushing impudence with which he snappishly and jeeringly attacks everything. The contempt into which he places himself, protects him from every resentment. Injuries from him are no injuries; even the most just reproach loses its significance and force in his mouth. Thus he moves about like a ridiculous phantom, useless to himself and a burden to others, the warning example of a view of life quite similar to that of Timon's, only that it is the perverted, reverse side. In the end he is far surpassed in his department by Timon, and we may assume that he was affected by this humiliation, or got better of his own accord. Alcibiades, lastly, on the one hand, connects the relations

between the personal life of the hero and the general life of the state and people, on the other, he too forms a certain contrast to Timon. Thus he, like all the other characters, is a necessary member in the organism of the whole, in so far as he essentially co-operates in the development of the character of the hero, as well as in the progress of the action, which again is the result of the development of the hero's character. For he exhibits in his person the *right* way in which *such* people, *such* men ought to be treated. He repels injustice by injustice, force by force, and preaches sense and morality sword in hand. But his *right* manner of managing life is suitable only for such a *wrong* sort of men, such a lawless people, and thus, in reality, it is in and of itself simply a *wrong* way.*

Now, it is the very fact of Alcibiades being, or at least appearing in the end to be in the right, that constitutes the defect of the drama. It too is wanting in the elevating, conciliatory element of the tragic pathos, and this especially marks its affinity to 'Titus Andronicus.' If Alcibiades is right, then life is not worth the living; there would, in reality, be no history, because there is no ethical progress in humanity; we should have in tears to exclaim with Flavius (iv. 2):

"Strange, unusual blood
When man's worse sin is, he does too much good '
Who then dares to be half so kind again?
For bounty, that makes good, does still mar men."

In such a case sin and injustice would *alone* prevail, and at most find their mutual corrective in themselves. In spite, therefore, of the artistic manner in which, here also, the several threads of the action seem gathered and formed into one harmonious whole—so that Shakspeare's great and often doubted power as regards dramatic com-

* H. Woelfell, in my opinion, forms too high an estimate of the character of Alcibiades in conceiving him to be a *pendant* to Timon. For this he lacks the purity of heart, the depth of feeling, the moral greatness and nobility of mind, which distinguish Timon's actions and the objects which he pursues. At all events if this was the intention Shakspeare had in view when weaving the story of Alcibiades into the representation by means of these loose threads, then the figure of Alcibiades is not strongly enough defined, not accurately enough delineated, has not sufficient light thrown upon it.

position (the essential point of all dramatic poetry) is again set forth in the most brilliant light—in spite of its single great beauties, and the deeply significant fundamental motive which supports the whole, we nevertheless leave the drama with the direct impression of an unresolved dissonance, and a closing dissonance left unresolved is a defect in all art. In addition to this the character of Timon, both in his love for and hatred of mankind, appears so highly idealised, or, if it be preferred, so exaggerated, carried so far beyond the ordinary human standard, that we cannot make ourselves take any true interest in him or his tragic fate. We feel too convinced that we should not act similarly under similar circumstances, that a similar fate could never befall us. His character, although by no means unnatural, is, nevertheless, of such an unusual type, such a mere exception to the rule, that he cannot excite in us any personal sympathy, but merely the interest of an extraordinary phenomenon, *i.e.*, a pure psychological interest.

Whatever, therefore, may have been the motives which induced Shakspeare to choose this subject, it always seems that, in his later years, he had lost the fine tact for what was the measure and limit of his art, which (except in his first youthful deviations, as in 'Titus Andronicus,' 'Henry VI.,' and others) had invariably been such a safe guide to him, and that, as in his youth, he had allowed himself to be carried away by the state of his own mind and feelings. When we compare this tragedy with his other, and probably his latest works, it can scarcely be disputed that his view of life must, in his latter years, have become more and more melancholy. Even in 'Macbeth' the conciliatory element of tragedy, the mild splendour of the setting sun, such as is spread over Romeo's, Lear's and Hamlet's death, is removed far into the background. There hangs over 'The Winter's Tale,' over 'Cymbeline,' 'The Tempest,' and even over 'Measure for Measure,' a profound, solemn earnestness of feeling. The shadows continue to become deeper, till finally in 'Timon of Athens' we have the full darkness of night, and it is only beyond the scenes of the play, as beyond human existence, that we behold the cheerful light of day.

It would be difficult to describe *Misanthropy* with such vigour and truth, without having experienced the feeling oneself. Shakspeare's state of mind about the time of the composition of the piece, must have been somewhat like that of *Timon's*, otherwise it is scarcely conceivable how he could have felt himself, even momentarily, attracted by this subject, which was not by any means specially suited for dramatic purposes. Moreover, there were sufficient external circumstances and reasons which, in the last years of his life, might have embittered his work as an artist, and even his whole life, in looking back upon it. He was doomed to see how that upon which he had lavishly spent all his mental energy was profaned and soiled by rude hands; doomed to see how the idea of beauty—as it presented itself to his mind, and with it the poetical power and depth of that view of life in which he had himself lived, and which he believed he had found to contain truth—was not merely driven out of the spirit of the age, but that the nation itself became more and more degenerate, both morally and politically. He had to confess to himself that his struggles and strivings had been in vain, that he and his works would soon be forgotten, perhaps for ever (this actually seemed to be the case a few decades after his death); it seemed to him as if art and poetry were for ever to be banished from his beloved England. Well, then, might the tone of his mind become a shrill dissonance, which he would then endeavour to embody in a corresponding and hurriedly sketched work, in order to shake it from his own soul. This seems to me confirmed, in addition to the general character of the whole drama, more especially by the strong satirical and cutting attacks upon a mercenary art, whose sole object was profit and success, and which was slavishly servile to every humour, every caprice of taste; this alone would testify to the late composition of the drama. For these reasons, which coincide in a striking manner with the peculiar nature of the text, I believe that 'Timon of Athens' is one of Shakspeare's last works, perhaps his very last production.*

* Marlowe assigns the play to about the year 1609, because North's translation of Plutarch—from which, according to Marlowe's opinion,

Shakspeare drew the subject of his two preceding dramas, *Julius Cæsar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*—probably induced him to take up the story of Timon (see Reed's edition of *Shak.* ii. 348 f. 354). Chalmers (*Supplemental Apology*, p. 391), on the other hand, lays hold of a few small coincidences in order to prove that *Timon of Athens* must have been written as early as the reign of Elizabeth. Drake (ii. 446) agrees with him although Chalmer's proofs make it exceedingly probable that the play cannot have appeared *before* 1612. There are no internal reasons for determining the time of its composition. Whether Shakspeare drew his subject from North's translation of Plutarch—who parenthetically introduces the fundamental features of Timon's history in his account of the life of Antony—or whether he took it from Paynter's earlier collection of novels (*The Palace of Pleasure*, i. 28) in which it also exists, or (what is the most probable supposition) from the old forgotten dramas which had taken up the same subject (one of which, a stiff academic production, is extant, and has been republished by A. Dyce among the papers of the Shakspeare Society under the title of *Timon, a Play now first printed*, etc., London, 1842)—is a question that does not admit of being decided. North's translation, at all events, offered Shakspeare a mere skeleton, without either flesh or blood—Delius fixes the date a little earlier, because he thinks that Shakspeare remodelled the foreign drama (which, in his opinion, is the foundation of our play) soon after his *Pericles*, which, according to him, originated in the same way and was originally the work of the same author. This point will be more fully discussed in our second volume.

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